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The Mockingbird

Department of Art and Design, East Tennessee State University

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Department of Art and Design, East Tennessee State University and Department of Literature and Language, East Tennessee State University. 2000. The Mockingbird. Johnson City, TN: East Tennessee State University. <https://dc.etsu.edu/mockingbird/15>

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Mockingbird
2000



Editor
Ryan S. Otto

Cover Design
Jeremy Pass

Interior Design
Roger Blanton
Jason Lifford

Literary Staff
Jennifer Bunn, Poetry
Todd Doman, Non-Fiction
Christy Spivey, Fiction
Brandon Story, Fiction

Advisors
Mr. M. Wayne Dyer
Graphic Design Workshop

Dr. Thomas Alan Holmes
Department of English

Mr. Ralph Slatton
Department of Art and Design

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Deanna Bryant
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Lisa Alther, a native of Kingsport, Tennessee, served as this year's fiction judge. She graduated from Wellesley College, Boston, Massachusetts, with a BA in English literature. After attending the Publishing Procedures Course at Radcliffe College, she worked for Atheneum Publishers in New York City then moved to Hinesburg, Vermont, where she has lived for the past thirty years. Lisa is the best-selling author of five novels: *Kinflicks* (1975), *Original Sins* (1981), *Other Women* (1984), *Bedrock* (1990), and *Five Minutes in Heaven* (1995). The five novels combined have sold over six million copies in 15 languages. She held the Basler Chair of Excellence at ETSU in 1999. Lisa Alther currently divides her time between Hinesburg and New York City.

John Bowers, a native of Johnson City, served as this year's non-fiction judge. He is an Associate Professor at Columbia University in the School of Arts and the author of seven books: *The Colony* (1972); *No More Reunions* (1973); *Helene* (1975); *The Golden Bowers* (1972); *In the Land of Nyx* (1984); *Stonewall Jackson* (1989); and *Chickamauga/Chattanooga*. He is the author of over 200 magazine articles. His one-act play, *The Remembrance of Things Present*, was presented off-Broadway in 1999. He held the Basler Chair of Excellence at ETSU in 1996. John Bowers presently lives in New York City.

Nell Maiden served as this year's poetry judge. She is currently the assistant director at William Penn House in Washington DC, a Quaker hospitality and seminar center. She has taught English at Virginia Intermont College, Bristol, Virginia; King College, Bristol, Tennessee; and at East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee. She is the author of *Reflections in a Clockshop* (1996), and has published poems, articles and reviews in *Poet Lore*, *A! Magazine*, *The Sow's Ear*, *Now and Then*, *Cumberland Poetry Review*, and *Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review* to name a few. She has served as associate editor of *The Sow's Ear* and has taught creative writing workshops at VI College in Bristol, Virginia; the Arts Depot in Abingdon, Virginia; and the Writers' Workshop in Asheville North Carolina.

Carol Norman, who currently lives in Jackson, Tennessee, served as this year's art judge. She is a painter, printmaker, and curator who teaches studio art and art history at Jackson State Community College. She graduated from the City College of New York (CCNY) in 1969 with a BA in fine arts, from ETSU in 1994 with an MFA in painting, and again from ETSU in 1997 with an MA in art history.

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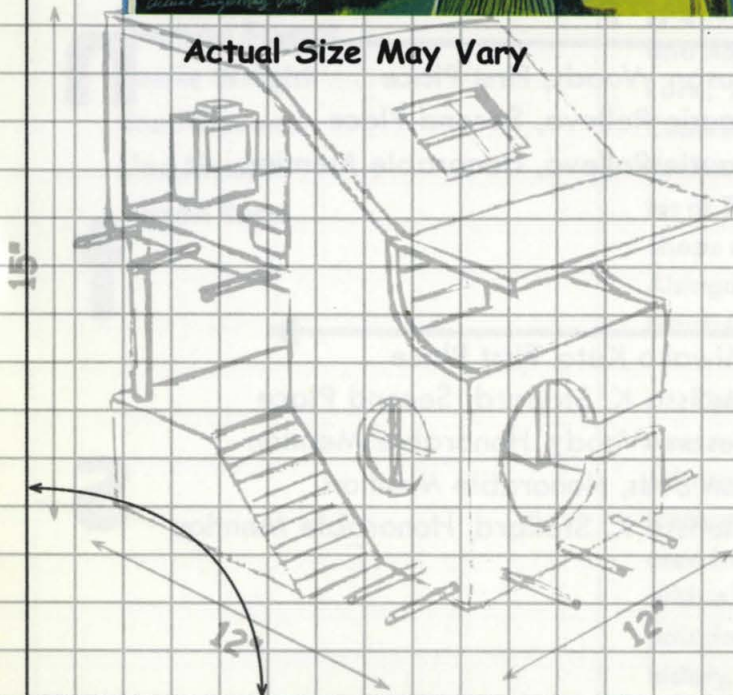
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Drawing/Printmaking
First Place
John Hilton



Actual Size May Vary

Lithograph



2"

Fiction
First Place
Tamara Baxter



DOOMSDAY MONDAY AT PEE WEE'S HAMBURGER EMPORIUM

See. It happened like this. It's a Monday. Lunch time. I'm on french fries. Herman's on the buns. Cherry's running the drive-through. Our dip-shit manager, Sammy Dedmon, is making burgers, patting them out real sloppy in his fat dimpled hands. I'm dipping the crinkles into the hot grease, two baskets full and two more ready when these come out. It's a boom day for a Monday. Nothing like you'd expect. People lined up in five rows at the counter, and a line of cars backed up from the drive-through window all the way out to the Wiley Dixon Highway. Some convention at the big Baptist church downtown. Five, maybe six hundred Baptists coming in from Bangkok to Kalamazoo, and our hamburger joint the only one in ten miles, either side of us, and only four of us on duty, dancing to keep up with the orders.

Normally, we can feed half the town of Dixon without a hitch. But our short order chef, Johnny Frizzell, is laying out of work again, so Sammy, the new manager, is grilling. As if he's got the talent to slap hamburgers like Johnny Frizzell. Johnny's a master short order grill man. Been at it all his life. He could slap out 500 burgers in a blitz. But this new shit manager we just got, Sammy Dedmon, he's too much a dufus to call in the back-up cook, Norma Gentry, who can slap and fry burgers nearly as good as Johnny.

No, Sammy ain't done a sensible thing in the two weeks he's been working here at Pee Wee's Hamburger Emporium, serving the best burgers and fries money can buy. You can see our sign towering 50 feet over the Emporium just off highway 181 going south toward Asheville. We live up to our name, cause that's the kind of class we have. Me, Gilbert Grubbs, Junior, I've been here

three years next month, and I'm the best damn fry-baby this side of Morgan City.

I says to Sammy, "Why don't you call in Norma Gentry. She won't mind coming in on short notice." I say this because Norma always comes in when Johnny is laying out. It's understood.

Sammy looks over at me with his pole-axed expression, then he shoots me this textbook bull about the responsibility of a manager to be sensitive to his employees. Sammy says Norma works too hard, and too many long hours as it is, always having to fill in for Johnny while he's off drunk.

"Norma's not a young woman any more," Sammy says. "She's worked the night shift and cleaned up. Besides, her son and his family have come to visit, and the decent thing to do is leave Norma in peace and do the best we can."

No. Norma ain't young anymore, but she's the kind that's like your mama. If you whine, she'll do just about anything you want her to, even if she's worked her ass off. She's that responsible kind that feels guilty, and if you know how to suck up the right way you can get her to stay late and clean up the meat grinder, even when it's your turn and she's already stayed late three nights in a row.

Working weekends at the Emporium, now that's what messes up your social life. We don't close until 11 p.m. on weekdays, and 12 midnight on weekends. In a town like Dixon where everybody's parents go to bed with the roosters, and all the sweet young things got to get their prissy asses in by 11 o'clock, well, you can see how it is. So, me and Johnny know how to play up to Norma, how to plead and give her that sweet peck on the cheek and tell her how pretty she's looking these days, even if she's sixty something and has more chins than an pug dog, and good old Norma will stay and mop the kitchen, and clean the tables. Yeah, Norma is the dependable type, every time. She's been working at the Emporium since she was forty. Her old man just up and left her about ten years ago, so what else has she got to worry about anyway?

Well, I got to defend Johnny cause he's my buddy. My hero. So I says to Sammy, "You've got to respect a real talent like Johnny Frizzell. Johnny makes the best burgers in Dixon, or Monroe City for that matter. He knows how to mix fresh ground chuck with sirloin, just the right amounts, how to put in secret seasonings, and how to shape the meat just right so them burgers come up juicy and lean. He's a real artist."

Besides, there's nothing exciting to do in a one-light town like Dixon, but get drunk or get laid. Better if it's both together. Johnny's got this real talent with women, too, and every once in a while he's got to have a big weekend. Usually, Johnny lays out on a Monday. I says to Sammy that it ain't Johnny's fault. Monday's most always a dud day.

Sammy takes off his round spectacles with the wire rims and while he's blowing fog on the lenses and rubbing them on his shirtsleeve, he gives me a sermon about Johnny Frizzell. How talent ain't nothing without responsibility. He looks at me over the rims of his glasses where he's set them down on the edge of his nose. When Sammy starts talking about respect, all I can think of is Mr. Whipple in the toilet paper commercial saying, "Please don't squeeze the Charmin! Please don't squeeze the Charmin!" and how Sammy Dedmon looks like Mr. Whipple and what a stupid word respect is when Sammy Dedmon is preaching it. I'm thinking Sammy Dedmon ain't been laid in his life.

When Johnny's laying out, we've all learned how to roll with the punches. That is, Norma Gentry, she grills on the afternoon and evening shift, and anytime else she's needed, and Herman Little, who builds the burgers and lays them on the plate, and Cherry Berry, who works the drive-through window and the cash register. And yours truly, Gilbert Grubbs. I make the fries, pour the drinks, and make the shakes. All of us are supposed to take turns on clean-up duty.

Doomsday Monday ain't all Johnny's fault, though. He didn't know anymore than we did about the Baptist convention. And Johnny had to

do something about Cherry Berry. See, Johnny used to have the hots for Cherry. She's only 17 and about as dumb as a coal bucket, which is why Johnny, who is 38 if he's a day, kind of got fed up with baby-sitting. He told me one day how getting the taco was great, but listening to all that whiny bull about her parents and how they was too strict and how Cherry was gonna run away from home and could she move in with Johnny made him feel like he'd just had a cold shower.

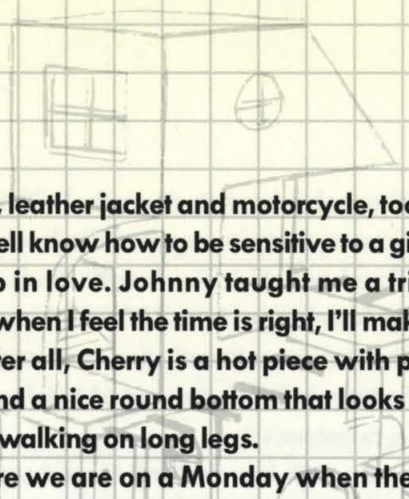
Cherry Berry is a dumb little trick, but it doesn't take a genius to figure out that Johnny Frizzell is trying to cut it off with her. Johnny's way to end a fling is to go cold turkey. Get him a hot date and make sure the girl he's trying to ditch finds out about it, which ain't hard in a town with a population of 538. But I sure as hell ain't going to tell Sammy that Johnny has been getting it with Cherry and now he wants to cut her off. That's why he's laying out.

Cherry comes in today moaning, "Where's Johnny? You seen him?" She's all flushed-faced and there's a row of salty sweat beads on her upper lip that I'd like to lick off. I'm looking at curves finer than a Barbie Doll's and not really concentrating on what Cherry is saying.

Herman winks at me and says to Cherry, "He's had a hot weekend. Probably laying a big one on some sweet young thing."

You can see Cherry is about to bust out in tears when she goes running off toward the girls' bathroom, her chest all swelled up from hitching her breath and holding it the way girls do when they get upset.

Herman is the kind of guy that likes to rub salt in a wound. He's scrawny with long arms that hang way out of his shirtsleeves. His face looks like a pepperoni pizza most of the time. He's just pissed that Cherry don't pay him no mind. Me, I wouldn't have gone that far saying the things he said to Cherry. I'm the quiet kind of guy that likes to be around to pick up the pieces. I'm not pretty-boy handsome like Johnny, who kind of looks like



the Fonze, leather jacket and motorcycle, too. But I sure as hell know how to be sensitive to a girl just busted up in love. Johnny taught me a trick or two, and when I feel the time is right, I'll make my move. After all, Cherry is a hot piece with pointy little tits and a nice round bottom that looks like a valentine walking on long legs.

So here we are on a Monday when the staff is usually cut back, and there's five hundred hungry Baptists lined up for burgers and fries, and Sammy's back here at the grill, mostly standing in the way acting like he knows what he's doing. He don't know shit.

Sammy's still wearing his nice white shirt and his navy blue power suit. He's got his shirt unbuttoned, though, and his yellow paisley tie hanging loose around his neck. Sammy doesn't even put on an apron. He's got grease spattered up and down the front of his shirt already. It must be 110 degrees back here. The air conditioning ain't worked right in a year, and Sammy's hunching over the dizzy heat of that big flat grill, sweating like a pig, waving the steam off with the long, metal spatula, flipping rows and rows of hamburgers like they was pancakes, burning some of them around the edges. He can't even see them hamburgers through the greasy steam, and ain't got sense enough to turn the grill down. Me and Herman wink at each other over a long row of Styrofoam plates with open buns on them, and don't say a thing. Let him burn the sonofabitching burgers. Serves him right.

Sammy's face is puffed up red and greasy. He's breathing hard and wiping his face with a dishtowel. Me and Herman see that he can't take the heat like we can. Sammy's roasted to about medium rare. That's when all shit breaks loose. A little old Grandma Moses standing back in that sardine crowd of church goers starts shouting, "Where's the beef? Where's the beef?" Everybody turns around and looks.

"We've got to speed things up," I say to Sammy. "Fries are getting cold already." Sammy looks back over his shoulder at that whole con-

gregation of hungry Baptist faces looking like they've been weaned on sour milk. I can see Sammy's mind jump out of his skull. Sammy gets so nervous he grabs another greasy spatula and unloads the whole grill with both hands flipping burgers everywhere, me and Herman trying to catch them before they slide off the plates. Two big ones go over the edge of the grill and land, kerplunk, right on Sammy's feet.

About the same time that the little lady in her Sunday hat and gloves is playing like she's in a TV commercial, the cars lined up outside the drive-through window start honking. I see out the window the cars backed all the way out the Emporium's circular drive and into the main street of Dixon, backed down farther than I can see. And I got four baskets of fries out of the grease and getting cold. Now, we got us a real crisis.

I've never seen this many Baptists in one place in all my life. Seems like a hundred wrinkled Sunday faces bobbing like the Saint Vitis Dance, some high and some low, and a hushy murmur of voices like the wind humming. And they've got this peculiar smell about them like mothballs, rosewater, Ben Gay, and Old Spice, all mixed and mingled together with the smell of hamburgers and french fries.

Cherry is working the drive-through window and the counter, too, racing from one side of the Emporium to the other, racing from the cash register to the counter to the window to the cash register. There's only one cash register so she's got to run across from the window to the other side of the counter and ring up the sales. Cherry keeps dropping money on the floor cause the Emporium cash register is an old antique model made back in the 1930's and the drawers ain't deep enough. The register makes a peculiar sound like crunch-crunch-tinkle-tinkle-ding every time Cherry rings up a sale, which is about every 30 seconds. Every few minutes Cherry scrapes the bills out of the overflowing drawer and runs off to the back of the Emporium.

Cherry's face is wet and swollen from crying

over Johnny Frizzell, and her baby blond curls are coming loose from under her golden Emporium hat. She's ringing up sales, stuffing them Baptist bills in the register, and wiping her eyes on her uniform sleeves. Cherry has this kind of frozen dumb look on her face that says, "Help me! Help me!" I look over at sweet Cherry with tears running down her face, a ten dollar bill clenched between her teeth, her hands making swift change from the cash register and feel the crotch of my jeans tighten.

Herman is crying, too. He's got onions shooting out of the slicer like it's a Frisbee machine, and a whole pile of tomatoes lined up on the counter. Hell, he hasn't even had time to rinse the grit off the lettuce leaves, but what's a man to do

when the mob is beating down the jail house door? I see Sammy running toward the back and saying, "Thank you God," when he finds five more bags of hamburger buns, 50 count each. Lucky thing the Rainbow bread man just made a delivery this morning. We ran out of ketchup, though. What a bummer.

Sammy still has the grill turned up too high, and a big cloud of grease and smoke rolls out across the counter and chokes the customers pushed up at the front, sends them into a coughing frenzy, waving their arms and their pocketbooks. Hell, it looks like the gas chamber at the state pen. That's when Sammy finally asks me how to turn the heat down. I go over to the grill and point to the controls along the right side. What

Photography
Honorable Mention
Jon Sells



Rocky Cliff

a dumb shit. Sammy refunds at least fifteen people who say their burgers taste like old ground up newspapers. They're real nice about it, considering they had to stand there for an hour and wait on their burgers in the first place. Sammy is hangdog sorry, and gives them a free milk shake. We ran out of meat, so he can't fry them another burger.

Well, what do you expect when you get a new manager that ain't never worked the ropes. Sammy got him one of them degrees in restaurant management from the Blountvale Community College. But he ain't never worked short order, or wiped tables, or rung up sales, or mopped the damn floors. Nothing. Sammy ain't never run a meat grinder or cleaned it up. It's a damned big grinder that takes fifty pounds of meat at a time. He heaves them big trays of fresh meat out of the cooler, balances them above the top of his head, and dumps in whole sirloin roasts without trimming them or cutting them up in chunks. He forgets to add the chuck, forgets to layer the meat in the grinder with the seasonings. If you run a grinder right it makes a soft purring sound and that meat oozes out real lean and fine. When Sammy runs the grinder, it groans and gurgles out that ground meat.

Sammy can't be taught a thing. Sammy's one of them book worms. Thinks books got all the answers. How did he learn about managing hamburger emporiums, I ask you? Going around to restaurants all over East Tennessee, taking notes on a clipboard and observing. Observing? What kind of shit is that? Sammy calls it field work. Now don't that beat all. My old man, Gilbert Grubbs, Senior, he can tell you all about field work. He can tell you about plowing fields and planting acres of wheat and corn, about mowing and picking and spudding tobacco. That's what my old man calls field work. That's why I stay away from field work.

Sammy's always bullshitting about human relations skills, money skills, management skills like that's all it takes to run a restaurant. Sammy claims

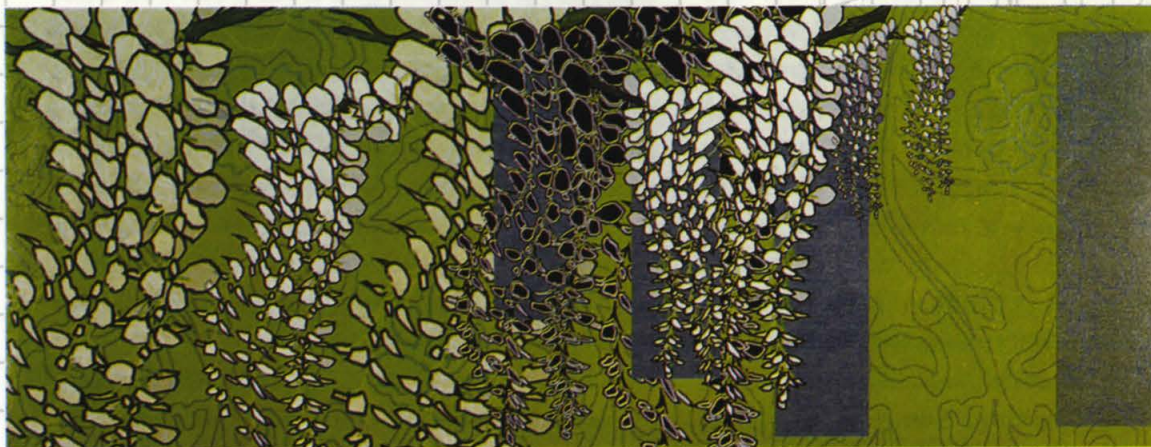
that if you get you a restaurant management degree you don't have to start on the bottom doing drudgework. You can get you one of them entry-level positions and wear a suit and a tie. Sammy says I ought to think serious about becoming a restaurant manager. "Gilbert," he says one day when I'm cleaning out the grinder with disinfectant, my hands full of red hamburger worms I'm pushing out of the feeder snout, and he's sitting on his ass looking at me like he knows something, "You need to get your GED and get into the community college like I did. Worry about your future, Gilbert. I mean it."

I says to myself, "Sammy, you don't know shit. Spending good money and wasting time with your nose in a book, and here you are manager, can't do a damn thing, and making \$5 less per hour than Johnny Frizzell, who's the best damn hamburger man in the business. A man with real talent." I try to picture Johnny with a book and a clipboard. Nah.

That's what the inside of my head is saying to Sammy, but I say, "Sure, Sammy. I'll think about it." I figure I'll tell him what he wants to hear. I'll be here at the Emporium long after dipstick Sammy gets his soft round ass booted out. Which won't be long when old Pee Wee Duncan, who founded the Emporium back in 1959 and made it what it is today, comes in here and sees how Sammy shits up everything.

Pee Wee's gone off for a month on business down to Florida. At least, that's what he told the old lady Duncan. Supposed to be buying restaurant equipment since he's going to open up a new branch of the Emporium in Morgan City, thirteen miles up the road. But Johnny tells me the other day that Pee Wee's mixing his business with pleasure, if you know what I mean.

Pee Wee hadn't been gone a week when our old manager, Booger Red Luttrell, died right there on top of the hamburger grill one night after we closed. Booger Red must have been cleaning it, cause Johnny found him next morning bent belly down across the grill with his feet still on the



Wysteria

floor and his arms reaching out toward the meat grinder. Coroner said it was a heart attack, and if the grill had been on, why Booger Red would have been done to a cinder and we'd never know the cause of death. Booger Red managed the Emporium for 30 years. He was a real pro, I want to tell you.

Anyway, when old lady Duncan saw Booger-Red gone rigor mortis on the grill, and she couldn't get in touch with Pee Wee down in Florida cause no one answered the number he left, well, she went crazy wild.

Now, I don't believe in fortune and fate, mind you, but wouldn't you know it, Sammy Dedmon, just graduated from the Blountvale Community College with his degree in restaurant management, comes along in his blue polyester suit, his white shirt, and yellow paisley tie carrying a whole stack of resumes he's been passing out at restaurants all up and down Highway 181.

Old lady Duncan takes one look at fat little Sammy in his power suit and his white shirt and thinks he's the answer to her prayers. She says, "Sammy, you're hired," and then she calls her Cousin Benny to go off to Florida and find Pee Wee. Johnny Frizzell tells me in strictest confidence

that he knows where Pee Wee is stashed at a Florida resort with Germaine Deal, the cute red-headed girl who works at Motlow's Florist and Gift Shop on Main Street. He ain't saying a thing, though. Why stick your nose in something that ain't none of your business.

Somehow, we pull off a restaurant miracle. Sammy is lucky this ain't a bankers' convention or a mob of hungry insurance salesmen. Might as well have your ass caught in the lawn mower. But these Baptists, they're genteel types. You can see they're pissed, though, by the way their faces go solemn, their lips get set in this straight, stiff line and a deep crinkle comes up over their eyes. A whole crowd of them with their arms crossed, looking like they got a corn cob up their ass, but not saying a thing, just letting out a sigh once in a while like a ketchup bottle opened after it's been standing in the heat. It's that damned patient silence that drives you crazy.

By three in the afternoon we got the five thousand fed, and they ain't but two couples sitting in the Emporium. One couple I know, Fred and Dora Sauceman, came in after the big crowd for milk shakes. The other couple must be with the Baptist group. He's a skinny feller with a dark suit on,

and damn if the blond don't weigh 350 pounds and she's wedged between the little plastic swivel seat and the little plastic table like a crooked quarter in a slot machine. She's got this peculiar look on her face like she's got gas on her stomach. Her nervous husband keeps coming over to the counter asking for another co-cola, but he's the one drinking them.

Finally, Fred and Dora suck dry and leave, and the only customers left is Jack Sprat and his fat wife sitting by the window squished up in the red plastic swivel seat with her belly all limbered out like syrup and oozing over the top of the yellow plastic table.

Sammy is trying to clean the grill, Herman is taking out the trash and then he's going to the butcher shop for more meat, and Cherry is throwing her apron on the floor, and running back to the girls' bathroom crying. I want to say something comforting to Cherry, like, "I know how you're feeling, Cherry. I'm here if you need me, Cherry", that kind of bull that a girl always falls for.

I'm standing over the grease vats shaking out two frier baskets in each hand, wondering if this grease will make it another day or two and thinking that maybe it's not the time to make my move on Cherry, and what would Johnny Frizzell do in a situation like this, when the nervous little feller comes up to the counter and says, "My wife and I are in a rather peculiar situation over here, and I wonder if you might help us?" He's got this daintified voice, a soft mannered guy with prissy hands and clean fingernails. He looks at you over the tops of his glasses with that concerned face that religious people get.

I put down the baskets and take off my apron. The nervous little feller runs ahead of me, then looks back and says in a whisper, "Come here. Come here," with his pointer finger wiggling me over. Well, as if I can't see as far as the windows. The Emporium ain't but 20 feet deep and 25 feet wide. Anyway, the man introduces himself real polite, "I'm Wilbur Hoffman and this is my wife,

Tessie. And it seems as if we've got ourselves into something of a predicament."

And before Wilbur Hoffman can tell me what's the matter, this Tessie starts bawling. To get right to the point, Tessie's stuck in Pee Wee's new plastic seat and table that he bought at an equipment auction over in Charlotte, North Carolina, last month. We just had all the old booths taken out and twenty of these fancy two-seater tables with plastic swivel chairs put in. Pee Wee figured we could seat forty people instead of the twenty we could handle before. Pee Wee says this is the rocket age, and progress is always necessary if you want to get ahead. And besides, expanding with new tables is cheaper than building on.

The way Wilbur Hoffman tells it, Tessie gets herself swiveled into the seat when they first get here, and he stands in line for the order while she holds their seats, but then after Tessie eats four half-pounder Emporiums, lettuce, tomato, onion, Mayo, and four large orders of crinkles, no ketchup, and two vanilla milk shakes and two cololas, she can't swivel out. And here's Tessie bloated up between the chair and the table, the table's edge looking like it's slicing her in two.

First, I tell Wilbur to get behind Tessie and pull back on the seat, and I'll get hold of the table on the other side and pull the opposite direction. Tessie is supposed to wiggle out the side when we loosen the seat. Wilbur gives Tessie's seat a heave-ho, turns red-faced like he's going to blow his guts out his nose, and I pull on the table with my heels dug into the plastic molding. Nothing happens. Pee Wee's plastic tables and chairs come in one piece. They're bolted to the walls and the floors. Space-age plastic don't budge.

Tessie is really panicking. In that lime green dress, she looks like a giant Jell-O trying to fly. Her big arms flap above her huge belly which has pushed up to the top of her chest where her heart would normally be, and her chest has pushed her titties under her chin. She says she'll suffocate and die if we don't get her out this

minute. Says she's been stuck over two hours, and our salty, green-tasting hamburgers are making her swell up. Besides which she's sick to her stomach and thinks she's been poisoned.

Tessie's face is puffy and pink like a Miss Piggy balloon, and it starts to float and bob around and around until she flat out faints and goes limp all over the table, dissolving into a big puddle of blubber. You'd swear that Pee Wee's new swivel table and chair had disappeared before your eyes.

Wilbur goes into hysterics and starts crying, "Please help her, please help her!" He's sobbing and shaking his hands and running in circles. Sammy comes around the counter to see what's causing the commotion.

"Oh, my goodness, Gilbert. Get some wet paper towels and put on her face," he screams at me. Then he runs out the door and around the building. I don't know where in the hell Sammy's gone, but in a minute he comes back in with a crow bar. Sammy dances around and waves the crow bar, trying to find a place to wedge it so he can pry the table loose from the wall. There ain't no place to wedge the crow bar that Tessie Hoffman ain't melted all over. She's still out of it and breathing in loud guffs.

Well, while Sammy Dedmon and Wilbur are running in circles, me, Gilbert Grubbs, Junior, takes the simple approach. I dial 9-1-1 and tell Monroe Lamb at the rescue squad to get his ass off that chair he sits propped in every day and bring a saw. We got a woman dying up here at the Emporium. Any damn fool can see by now the only way to get Tessie Hoffman out of that plastic chair is to saw her out.

Monroe Lamb never does anything unless he does it big. He gets to the Emporium quick as a wink cause he's only two blocks down the street, and he brings the rescue truck, the fire department, and five patrol cruisers, and they're sitting out in front of the Emporium with the blue lights and sirens blasting away. You never heard such a racket since the Lowman's Arsenal blew up last

year on Pigeon Creek. The newspaper said that a woman named Teresa Green forgot the company rules, DANGER, DANGER. VOLATILE MATERIALS. NO PANTY HOSE ALLOWED BEYOND THIS POINT. Teresa generated static electricity between her legs that blew up a vat of ether. People from over in Morgan City said it knocked the glasses out of their cabinets. What can I say. We don't have many emergencies here in Dixon, but when we do, we go all out.

Monroe Lamb saunters into the Emporium, nonchalant, with a chain saw dangling on his leg like he's Clint Eastwood in a spaghetti western. Half a dozen firemen and four sheriff's deputies come in behind. "What's the situation here?" he says, rolling a toothpick east to west between his teeth.

Tessie is turning blue. Wilbur is holding Tessie's head up and blowing in her mouth. But Monroe can't find no way to get the saw in between the table and the wall with Tessie laying all over it. Finally, Monroe goes outside and jack-hammers the wall out so the table will come loose. Tessie oozes out of her chair onto the big pile of rubble like unmolding a giant Jell-O.

It takes eight squadsmen to move Tessie. They get Tessie's head and shoulders on the stretcher, and her legs and feet ooze off the bottom, and then they get her legs back on, and her head and arms jiggle off. So finally Monroe Lamb rigs up a tarpaulin with two poles rolled up in the ends and they hoist her out on the world's biggest stretcher. All this going on while a squadsmen is trying to hold an oxygen mask over her mouth.

Wilbur is scared shitless. He tries to keep his cool, though. He tells Sammy in that dignified churchy voice how he and Tessie tried to avoid a scene. They tried hard not to cause trouble. They tried hard to handle this incident quietly. And now look what we've done. The town of Dixon has sirens and lights blazing to glory, and most of the Baptist convention and the whole town is standing out in the street, craning their heads to see Tessie being sawed out of her seat.

Tessie comes around for a few seconds when the squadmen hoist her stretcher up off the rubble. She opens her eyes and lifts her head toward Sammy, who is as stiff and white as my Aunt Grace's starched shirts, and whispers with her last breath before she passes out again, "I'm going to sue."

I pick up the wet paper towels I got to put on Tessie's face and hand them to Sammy. He's got that glazed look like somebody that's been hypnotized, like he wants to walk out of his body and leave it.

Well, I'd like to say that saving Tessie Hoffman's life was the high point in my day. But it wasn't. After all the sirens blue-lighted Tessie and Wilbur toward the hospital, and the pilgrims marched back toward the downtown Baptist Church, and everything finally got quiet, Sammy Dedmon sat in the floor staring at the big hole in Pee Wee's Emporium, kicking at the pile of rubble with his big toe. Booger Red would have grabbed a wheel barrow and a trowel. That's the kind of manager he was.

Anyway, I figure Sammy Dedmon is out of his gourd, so me, Gilbert Grubbs, will take charge. I'll get the cash register emptied and the money counted and over to the bank before four o'clock. I figure there's a big bundle of bucks in the till after all the business we done today.

Surprise. Surprise. Surprise. I can't find but \$38.42. I look under the money tray and on the floor and on the counter and in the emptied garbage can, but they ain't but \$38.42 anyway I count it. I go over to the place on the floor where Sammy is sitting cross-legged and green around the gills, and I show him the money. Only \$38.42.

Well, Sammy jumps up quick and says, "Where's Cherry Berry? Ask Cherry. Maybe she's cleared the register and taken the money down to the Dixon National."

I tell Sammy I ain't seen Cherry the whole time we're saving Tessie Hoffman from Pee Wee's new swivel chair and table and it ain't likely she's done the banking.

Now picture this. Sammy looks right past me at something and I turn around. There's Cherry Berry standing white-faced and glazed like she's a zombie walking out of a graveyard. She's been crying in the girls' bathroom all this time. I'm thinking right about now I should make my move on Cherry. Johnny Frizzell always says, "Catch 'em at their lowest point."

Then Sammy comes over and waves the money at her, asking where's the rest of the money from all the hamburgers we sold today?

Money? What Money? Cherry can't talk about the money. All she can say is that Johnny Frizzell don't love her anymore. How is she going to live without Johnny? What is she going to tell her parents when they find out she's knocked up? What is she going to do now?

"No money? No Money?" Sammy shouts in Cherry's face. Then, Sammy tells Cherry to hang up her apron and turn in her uniform. She's fired!

Cherry starts bawling again and runs back into the girls' bathroom. We hear the door slam and the lock snap like a clap of thunder. I think about Cherry's situation now and I can hear Johnny Frizzell whispering in my ear, "Gilbert, run like hell!"

Sammy grabs hold of the counter and looks up at me with a wild, flat face, like Mr. Whipple pressed against a glass window. "Do you think we should call Norma Gentry, Gilbert? What do you think? What do you think about calling Norma Gentry, Gilbert?"

I say, "Yes, Sammy. That's a good idea. You ought to call Norma."

Call Norma Gentry, the dip-shit says. Monday might have been a different story if we'd had Norma Gentry here. Call Norma Gentry? Hell, ain't that what I told him to do in the first place? I tell Sammy he'd better notify old lady Duncan, too. She'll shit a squealing worm when she finds out there's a hole in the Emporium wall big enough to see the whole town of Dixon.

Just as I get the squealing worm picture in my mind, I look up and there's old lady Duncan and

Norma Gentry staring through the open wall looking like the Grandma Bobsy Twins with purple hair, rouged cheeks, lapdews dangling on their collars, and little square pocketbooks dangling on their wrists.

When old lady Duncan fired Sammy Dedmon, he was standing on top of the Dempsy Dumpster behind the Emporium, tearing through bags of garbage. Potato peels and dirty napkins falling through his fingers. Mustard stains and grease spots all over his clothes. Searching for the green bags of money which old lady Duncan explained to him, standing there with her hands on her hips, he had done fried up and fed to his customers.

Seems that Pee Wee's old cash register got so full of money it wouldn't shut, so Cherry had been rolling up the bills and laying them on the meat tray in the cooler. Said it was the only safe place she could think of. Told you she's dumb as a coal bucket, didn't I? Anyway, Sammy Dedmon picked up the meat tray with the money and sent it all through the grinder. The most expensive damned burgers ever served from Pee Wee's grill.

I won't ever forget Sammy Dedmon standing on top of that garbage, porky pig drawn against the sky, the sun going down pinky cheeked over Dixon. I reckoned I felt right sorry for him. But just for a second.

Then I think about how it's going to be when old lady Duncan makes me manager of the Emporium. Who else can she turn to? Herman Little ain't worked but one year. He don't know shit. Johnny Frizzell ain't going to give up his nights off. Norma Gentry is old as a granny woman. That leaves me, Gilbert Grubbs, Junior, thinking about wearing a yellow power tie and a blue suit and growing a mustache and getting my shoes shined. Somehow, the picture of Booger Red comes to mind, working at the grill in his overalls and a white undershirt, sweat drops dangling off his beard. I come to my senses. I'll wear my best suit coat and some blue jeans.

I practice real hard what I'll say to everybody

working for me. I see Cherry Berry begging for her job back. I'll have to tell her that beauty ain't nothing without responsibility. That's why it's her fault she's knocked up. I'll tell Norma Gentry she's old as Methuselah. She'd be no use on a doomsday. Make her feel bad. Even an old woman's got to be kept in her place, and I ain't having no trouble out of her. And Johnny Frizzell? I picture telling him to get his ass to work on time for a change. After all, we got five hundred hungry Baptists to feed again tomorrow and if anybody gets fired, it ain't gonna be me. I run a movie of it behind my eyes.

That ain't the way the movie plays. Picture this. Tuesday morning early. Me and Herman Little and Johnny Frizzell, him still puffy under the eyes and sagging about the shoulders, all standing behind the counter in the Emporium. A big black tarpaulin pinned over the hole in the wall. Old lady Duncan's flour sack hips swinging into the Emporium. She's decked in a white apron and purple sneakers to match her purple hair and totting a grocery bag clinking with kitchen utensils. Behind her comes the purple shadow, Norma Gentry. Norma's face is bright as a dime that's swallowed a gold dollar.

First, old lady Duncan gathers us in front of the grill for a prayer. Herman is snickering behind me. I reach around and pinch his soft belly. After the amen, she sterns up. "Things are going to be different around here from now on. Meet your new manager." She lays her fingers on Norma Gentry's shoulder.

It's a pin drop quiet moment until Herman backs into a metal pan of lettuce and it crashes, then rumbles across the floor. Johnny Frizzell yawns like he don't give a damn. He's an artist. He knows how to fake it.

Norma runs her fingers across the grill. Holds them up to the light. Sucks air between her teeth. She growls at Herman to clean up his mess. "You Gilbert," she says. "Cleaning duty tonight. Better get out of that suit." Then she picks up a knife and walks toward Johnny Frizzell. She whispers

something in his ear and jabs the knife toward his crotch. He straightens up fast and heads for the meat cooler.

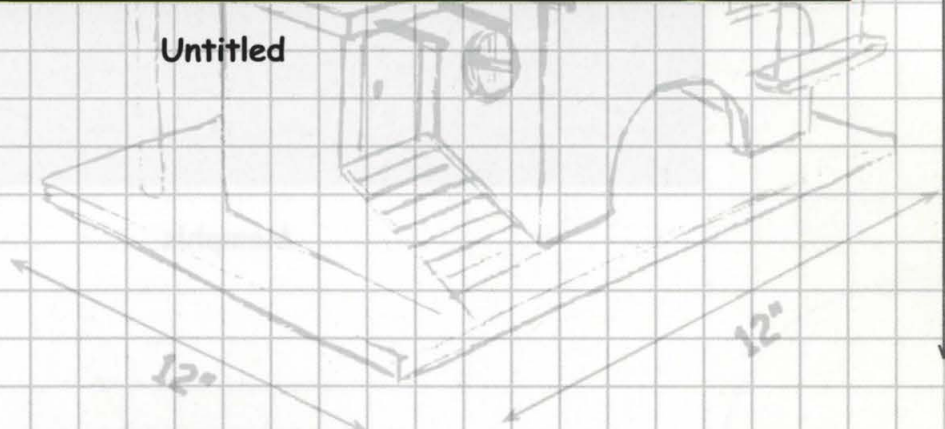
A strange voice comes out of Norma. "Get to work, you turkeys," she screams at me and Herman. "You're on the clock!"

Norma's voice is a giant gong vibrating through the Emporium. It fades to a loud ringing deep inside my ears and then to a jarring inside my brain. Yeah. It sounds like the crack of doom.

Photography
First Place
Miwako Kato

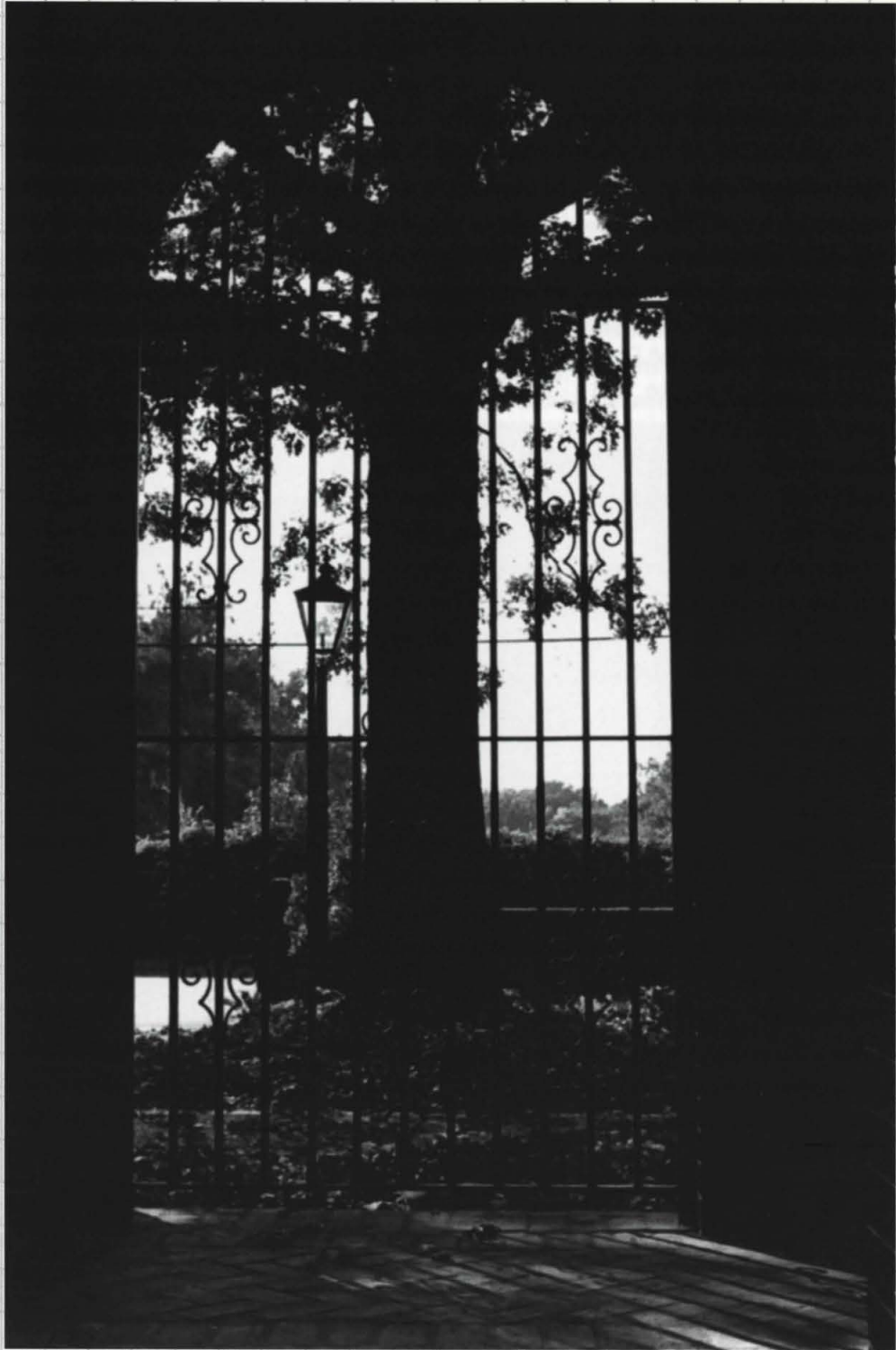


Untitled



13"

Photography
Honorable Mention
Susan Woody



Memphis

14"

Poetry
First Place
Emily Carmichael



View (Frost-on-Windowpanes)

Andersen's *Snow Queen* held fascination
For me as a child. In winter,
When the wind that fled through the pines
Was unadulterated and wild,
I yearned to follow.
Would there be an Ice Palace
Balanced precariously at the pole,
And the lead-white beauty of a Queen
Dancing, bathed in Northern lights?
And would I, too, be that beautiful
In the telling glow of the *Aurora Borealis*?
But I never warmed pennies on the stove
To make peep-holes in the frost;
But I never had a friend like Gerta, or like Kai.
Still I understand what Frost meant
About the sound of trees.
It is the same story (different voice)
As one bred into my blood:
Some of us were never meant
To root so deeply in one place.
I, too, am meandering;
I, too, fear that I might wake
Some morning as the spring is warming its way
Skyward from beneath a crust of tired snow
And realize, with a feeling like the sound of thunder,
That I have paled stagnant intentions
To reflections on the surface of a pool.
So it is good to know that fetters
Ought to be broken, and not endured-
That is, the living spirit can't be bound.
I'll have less to say then, too. But a friend
Once told me - and I believe him -
That words are meaningless; a heart
Should speak for itself.



Non-Fiction
Second Place
Sylvia Musgrove



Like Trees Walking

All perspectives change in Indian summer. Varying angles of light shift, revealing the hidden corners and root wells of the land. This patient, last partner of the cycle shows you the remaining breaths of the year, and the time never seems more marked, or beautiful.

On one afternoon, late October, I sat with a group of friends, studying. Our eyes were beginning to adjust to this chapter of the season, but none of us could believe it, even when it happened before our eyes: In the quiet circle of friends, in the quiet circle of the college green, we stared, gaping, as the horizon of the last fifty years spun and crashed.

We had been content to sit together and read, enjoying a bower that had just begun to be alive with color and a cooler touch to the air. In our valley we were gathered in, loosely held in a ring of trees. The sense had bonded us, allowed us to become accustomed to the rhythm of each other and our surroundings, including the nearby nasal snarling of a chainsaw.

We heard the snap, although the snap wasn't audible. Saw the strange turning, one of the oldest, tallest trees on campus rotating on its axis just like the waning year. A huge poplar, stories high, a "singing" tree some would call it, freshly dead and descending. Its tonnage struck the ground with little more than a whisper.

The twenty of us on the oval were shocked. A few of us glanced around for reassurance, held our stomachs. If we had been in a neighborhood or even a forest it would have had little effect, but in this atmosphere of appreciating the last leaves it unnerved us. Someone made a reference to Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*: "Oh well, another dryad gone." We laughed. But the sense

of helplessness bothered us all. I think it was the first time in my semi-adult life when I realized I had come to measure all my years, and most of the symbols in my mind, by trees.

Since then I've searched these symbols out in the visual arts and in literature. Most of the works are clichéd, do little more than draw my attention to the fact a tree is one of the first pictures a child doodles, there once were druids, etc. But a few passages linger. One of the most troublesome sections I've read comes, surprisingly, from the New Testament. It's exceedingly poetic for it not to be in Psalms. Jesus has touched a blind man's eyes, and as the man's vision comes to life for the first time, he gazes around him and says of his sight "I see men, like trees walking" (Mark 9:24).

His words linger. I search, I turn the syllables in my mind, needing them somehow to reform their structure. I try to add a little punctuation to make it more sensible: "I see men, like trees, walking." But that's not how it's written. "I see men, like trees walking." Like trees walking. I've seen rain walk, seen the clouds from a distance striding along the ground, turning up their legs to empty them. I know truth marches, rivers run and time flies, but I've never seen anything like trees walking.

My own physical blindness was recently cured, and now I wish I could go back to those moments on the oval, watch that tree descend again. I've been nearsighted since I was ten; the world to me without my glasses was rounded, soft, a moving gallery of indistinct faces that went unrecognized unless they spoke. I had sight long enough to remember what things look like, could recall clarity and occasionally achieve it with contacts, only to have to return to glasses and finally legal blindness at night.

Still, beauty within this affliction continually drew me to the woods: I would walk the half-mile from my farmhouse to the rim of the national forest, stand within a grove of tall poplar in October, take off my frames and crane upwards.

There I would stand, the liquid cooled blue fall sky burning overhead, light cascading through an incomplete canopy of yellow, a shade worn only by something desperately alive. Nearby maples and locust provided contrasts of rust-red and orange, deepening the spectrum. The dance of the leaves against the sky, individually indistinguishable but altogether moving in my sight, became a collage of color tactile in its joy. As Coleridge wrote, "Pale beneath the blaze/Hung the transparent foliage; and I watch'd/Some broad and sunny leaf, and lov'd to see/The shadow of the leaf and stem above/Dappling its sunshine!"(403-404).

Losing this vision of the trees was my only reservation in having my eyesight fixed with a little sharper line of that same light. Within a few seconds, a laser evaporated the superfluous cells that unfocused me. You might say it stripped away the dead bark.

Scarce minutes after surgery, as I was being driven home, I committed a medical sin: I opened my new eyes and searched for the tree line. To my joy, one vision was traded for another; I gave up the dissolved dance for a dimensional zoom lens that suddenly reminded me, for the first time since childhood, what amazing shapes these limbs and trunks create, how beautifully they occupy their given space, how well they shape the space between them. Would that we all did so well in the dance. I saw it anew, focused clearly on the forest.

But I never saw it walking.

I held a branch on my back once, felt the power of its pull. I'd gone into a laurel grove to cut a branch for a friend who's in the habit of carving walking canes. Some of her most interesting creations come from the wandering shapes of laurel branches-laurel is a tree with air-roots instead of leaves, the branches become so convoluted. I descended into a marshy grove, thanked the laurel, sawed off a limb. Its dwindling end made it a little taller than I wanted. There was no way I could carry it upright, so I

had to balance it across my shoulders, counterweight it to keep it from dragging. On my way down the field I saw something move, stopped to check it out; a groundhog was there, munching among the tall grasses. Laurel leaves must be excellent camouflage. He was only forty feet away...I expected him to bolt and be swallowed by the ground. He didn't stir. I did right then, but only because a small wind picked up, rustling the still-living leaves at the end of the burden on my back. I found myself leaning in a breeze too light for kite, strong enough only to tangle my bangs-but as long as I wore my chlorophyll coat, it was powerful enough to pull me along stumbling. I guessed then that if all the tree roots didn't go so deep, forests would go sailing around the continents, providing portable shade and certainly making the Weather Channel more interesting. "Look out in South Dakota today, where a trough in the jet stream has brought a southeasterly aspen front..."

But I never did feel it walking. I was the only one doing that.

In truth I am convinced the only thing that has held our fragile Appalachia together this long this time is the delicate network of roots, the veins of birch and dead chestnut, silver maple, locust, poplar and flowering dogwood. We are upheld by our foundation, these simple filaments that bind and burrow. Their infiltration of the earth reminds us of our own deep works of the soul; as roots press into fertile ground, beauty furrows down within the spirit.

More so than the physical twining, though, I feel the roots and their top-trees serve a second purpose. As surely as roots wander and grow underground, I know somehow that there are similar surface skins laced between the trees-not the branches, just simple, invisible filaments of life. Like most essential truths, this sensation cannot be adequately voiced or worded. But I have stood in the center of their tapestry, and were I viewed from above with innate, knowing eyes, I would be seen as a prize, not struggling, caught at the

center of a finely devised web.

Lying in that web I recall my first sensation of this thrumming existence. I was seven, loved to climb. I was pretty darn handy with a hammer, too. One afternoon I tacked a path of nails like railroad tracks up the dogwood in my grandmother's front yard. The next thing that happened was a miracle of belief and determination: those nails were barely seated in the tree's flesh, but their simple substantiation provided me a ladder. I have no idea how; I was no feather, but the nails held my weight, let me go skyward.

When I reached the lower limbs the crackly bark ground in my palms, stinging. The smell of it, pungent, tea-like and salty, is still new in my mind. When I swung up into the branches and turned to look around me, Grandma's front yard seemed like an entire meadow; those six foot heights gave me the stature of a giant striding above the tree-tops, each foot resting along a branch. Exhilaration sprouted plans in my mind for a likewise ladder on every tree; lucky for the grove I didn't return until about a week later, when I noticed a black, fester-some tinge emerging from the dogwood's bark. Sickness. Unmistakable. Decay, destruction where before there had been healthy hardwood.

Surely this wasn't my handiwork. But I asked my mother and grandmother about its appearance. "Did you drive nails into the trunk?" one of them inquired, I can't remember which. To my memory they were a collective on occasion. I mumbled and fidgeted, answering yes, but those nails hadn't gone too far in, and of course the tree couldn't feel anything. I wanted to climb, needed the nails, how could this harm anything? Disbelief died when the pair corroborated the sourness in my stomach:

"Oh Sylvia, nails will kill it."

In that instant I exchanged worded awareness for innate ability; I gained understanding, and forgot how to climb. Granddaddy, a strong brown trunk himself, had to crane me down from too-tall limbs after that, limbs I had once reached

and easily descended sans assistance. I would have liked to use my hammer to help again, but nails would never again suspend me. They bent within my grasp.

When I drove by my grandparents house the other day, I felt a wavering, peculiar pain to see that the hedges I remembered as child-high were grown far above even Granddaddy's expert reach; the dogwood where I first learned and loved to climb is still there, spindly-alongside a maple, which is much taller, and I don't know the name of the person who planted it.

Yet when I see that wavering dogwood, I feel like every needlessly borne guilt, dogmatic theory, spiritual rule, cultural icon or pseudo-responsibility in me is a nail driven into its trunk-or a lead-bellied falseness tacked onto mine. I look forward to the day when an earthquake of recognition, love-fueled, rumbling deep within the ground of understanding will help me to seek out infirmity, those boughs that don't bear fruit. Then in a moment of wonder or acceptance, forgiveness-or even a windstorm of necessity, those broken and bloodless branches will be flung free. Maybe in that moment I will know what it is like to focus clearly with true sight and see men, like trees walking.

If we heal our deaf, what will they say to the first time they hear the wind filtered through branches? Or to the shriek of ice covered limbs, the babyish yawn of a first spring rain? I hear trees, like...what?

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison." *English Romantic Writers*. Ed. David Perkins. San Diego: Harcourt, 1967.

Mark. Bible. King James Version, Open Bible Ed. Nashville: Thomas, 1975.

Drawing/Printmaking
Second Place
Isaac Denton



Grandfather as Chesire Cat

Pencil Drawing

19"

Fiction
Honorable Mention
April Massey



Blind Date

Rachel introduced herself to the man in the corner booth by tripping over her own feet and dumping the lukewarm contents of a coffeepot in his lap. She watched in muted horror as he sprang from his seat, giving a loud cry of dismay, and tried to pry the wet denim from his thighs. Hastily snapping to attention, she pulled a cloth from the pocket of her apron and stepped forward to help clean the mess.

The poor coffee-covered man obviously did not trust her motives. He shot her a wary glance and grabbed the cloth before she could move any closer. Then, screwing his face into a scowl, he wiped gingerly at the front of his jeans. Unfortunately a stain had already taken shape and, in direct retaliation, the man's lower lip stuck out into a pout.

Rachel was on the verge of apologizing for her clumsy actions, but when she noticed his childish expression she was attacked by a fit of giggles. She slapped a hand across her mouth and fought to contain the misplaced merriment.

Stilling his efforts, the man gave her a disgruntled look.

That only made her laughter worse. She felt certain that if he could see the expression on his face, he would be laughing too. Only he wasn't. He continued to stare at her stoically.

"I'm . . . I'm . . ." she stammered. "I'm sorry. It's just that you look so . . ."

"Ridiculous?" he supplied in an acid tone after taking another useless swipe at the ugly, brown stain.

Rachel's green eyes sparkled. "I was going to say drenched, but ridiculous works too."

As he began to see the humor in the situation, the man's expression slowly turned to amusement. He inspected his appearance a little more

closely. "So, you don't think it's a significant fashion statement?"

"That really depends on what you were going for."

"I think that casual with a touch of . . ." he grinned sheepishly, "drenched in a good look for me."

She grinned back at him. "Well, you've certainly achieved it."

"With a little help from you."

"I'm sorry. I am so, so sorry." She took the cloth from his hand and mopped the remaining coffee from the tabletop and red vinyl seat. After righting his cup and saucer, she picked up the coffeepot and looked at it critically. "I can't believe I did that."

His brown eyes followed her movements with amused interest. "Stop apologizing. It was an accident. It could've happened to anyone."

"No." She tossed her long, dark ponytail over her shoulder and flashed him another smile. "It usually happens to me. I'm a little accident prone."

He slid back into his seat, chuckling softly. "Oh, really?"

"Yes, but I can honestly say that I've never assaulted anyone with coffee before."

"That's good to hear," he lamented with mock severity. "Because if it were a habit, I think you would have to consider another line of work."

"Oh, I don't work here."

He looked at her sharply, his gaze moving pointly from the coffeepot to her apron and back to her face.

"I'm just helping out a friend."

He nodded his understanding, then slowly turned to stare out the rainy window pane, looking for all the world as if he'd rather be anywhere but there. When he turned around again, he found her watching him with open curiosity and the corners of his mouth tipped up into a half grin.

Feeling her cheeks heat with embarrassment, Rachel quickly dropped her gaze and turned on her heel to leave. His next question stopped her in mid-stride.

"Would you like to sit down for minute?"

Surprised by the request, she hesitated.

"You could keep me company until my date arrives."

"You're waiting on a date and you want me to keep you company?"

"Yeah." He shrugged. "It's just a blind date."

Her eyebrows rose in an expression of skepticism. "Just a blind date?"

"You threw hot coffee all over me," he reminded her good-naturedly, "and I'm going to make a terrible impression when this girl shows up. The least you could do is sit down and make a little conversation until I have to face her."

Still clutching the soiled cloth in her hand, Rachel gestured vaguely toward the kitchen. "I told you I'm helping out a friend."

"There are only three customers in the whole place. I think you can take a break."

She looked around the diner. The other two customers, a man and woman seated at the counter, alternated between conversation and devouring their cheeseburgers. No help there. She continued to search for some task that needed her attention, but nothing presented itself. "Ok, but only for a minute because I have to—"

"—help out a friend," he finished for her.

She grinned at his use of her own words and slid into the booth.

"What's your name?"

"Rachel."

"I'm Scott. It's nice to meet you."

She met his outstretched hand with one of her own. "Nice to meet you too."

A moment of awkward silence spread out before them. They looked at each other, neither knowing what to say. Finally Rachel broke the spell by blurting out the first thing that came to her mind. "So, tell me about this blind date."

All signs of amusement fell from Scott's face. He shifted uncomfortably in his seat. "Not much to tell. It's just one in a long line of many." He played with his cup and saucer, aligning and re-aligning them as he spoke. "I have a couple of married friends who have decided it's time for

me to grow up, meet a nice, respectable girl and settle down. You know, the whole deal."

"You don't sound too happy about 'the whole deal'."

"Have you ever been on a blind date?"

"No, I haven't experienced that part of life yet."

"Well, let's hope you keep it that way. This is not the actual date anyway," he explained. "It's more like the . . . pre-date interview."

"A pre-blind date interview?"

He paused to run his fingers through his dark, blond hair. "Yeah, it was her idea. She probably just wants to size me up and calculate my worth before actually going out with me."

"That's a bit harsh, don't you think?"

"I don't know. Maybe." He shrugged again, then looked at her searchingly. "I bet you're one of those starry-eyed dreamers who believes in fairy tales, true love, all that stuff."

Rachel bristled under his slightly mocking tone. "Is that such a bad thing?"

Scott sighed long and deep. "No, I don't guess so. It's just a hard belief to hold on to."

"Maybe you just haven't met the right person yet."

"And there's someone for each of us?" he asked as if he already knew her answer.

"Yes," she insisted with conviction. "There is someone for each of us, but you have to pay attention. You never know when you're going to meet that person. You have to be open for it. It could be the person your friends set you up with or the person sitting next to you on the bus or—"

"—or the person who assaults you with a caffeinated beverage."

Rachel gulped and issued a nervous little giggle. "Listen to me rambling on like I know what I'm talking about."

"You've got me convinced." His face split into a bright smile. "When do you want to meet my parents?"

"What?!"

"My parents," he said, only half-teasing. "I

think you should meet them."

"Whoa." She reached to take his cup away from him. "You have definitely exceeded the legal limit."

"It's empty." He lifted the small mug to illustrate. "Besides I've only been drinking coffee."

"Yeah. Caffeine." She nodded knowingly. "It does weird things to people." Attempting to make her escape, she quickly slid out of the booth, picked up her cloth and coffeepot and turned to leave. Once again, he stopped her with his words.

"I mean it, Rachel."

Looking at him long and hard, she sat back down with a bounce. "Is this your way of asking me out?"

He played with his cup and saucer again, avoiding her eyes. "If I were asking you out, what would you say?"

She glanced over her shoulder toward the counter. "I... I can't."

"Why not?"

"You don't want to go out with me. You just met me."

"But I like you."

"You're here to meet someone else."

"But I like you."

"You're here to meet someone else," she insisted. "If I said yes, I'd feel like I was being disloyal to my... gender, or something."

"And if you said no? Who would you be disloyal to then?"

Rachel searched his eyes for sincerity, then sighed. "I can't say yes."

"You haven't said no either," he reminded her.

"You don't even know me."

"Maybe I'd like to get to know you."

She stared at him dumbly.

He chuckled. "I think I caught you a little off-guard."

"You might say that."

He consulted his watch. "It doesn't look like this other girl is going to show up. I'm going to go now."

"You're going to go?!" she exclaimed in disbelief.

"Yeah. I don't want you to feel like you have to say yes just because I put you on the spot. I'll come back. Tomorrow? Will you be here?"

"I guess so."

"It was nice to meet you, Rachel." He slid out of his seat, stood and pulled a couple of dollars out of his pocket. "Think about what I said. I'll be back." Throwing the money on the table, he looked down at his coffee-stained jeans and shrugged helplessly. Then, shooting her a grin and a wave, he walked toward the door.

She watched as he took his jacket from the coat rack, pulled it over his head and dashed out into the rain. Dazed, she sat in that booth for a long time before moving. Then, slowly making her way to the counter, she sat the infamous coffeepot down with a 'thunk' and collapsed onto the nearest stool. Exhaling loudly, she dropped her head into her folded arms.

"What'd you do? Get his life story?" a voice teased from behind the counter.

"No, we just talked," was Rachel's muffled reply.

"You were supposed to serve him the coffee, not spill it on him."

Rachel looked up sharply at the waitress before her. "I didn't plan that."

The girl poured two cups of coffee, passed one to Rachel and took the other for herself. "Well? Are you going to tell me what happened or not?"

Rachel took the cup she offered and stared at it vacantly. "Why me?"

"What?"

"Why'd you pick me to interview your perspective date?"

"I didn't pick you," the blond behind the counter clarified, "You volunteered."

"No, I didn't."

"Yes, you did. You said you were my very best friend and that I could count on you to be completely honest."

"Ok, ok. I remember now." She sighed.

"Where were you anyway? You didn't even come talk to him."

"I was hiding out in the kitchen. You were supposed to report back and let me know if I would be wasting my time, remember?"

Rachel flinched. "I was supposed to size him up and calculate his worth," she said more to herself than to her companion.

"I wouldn't put it like that exactly. Just tell me what he's like."

"What he's like? I don't know. What do you want me to say?"

"You could start by mentioning how cute he is."

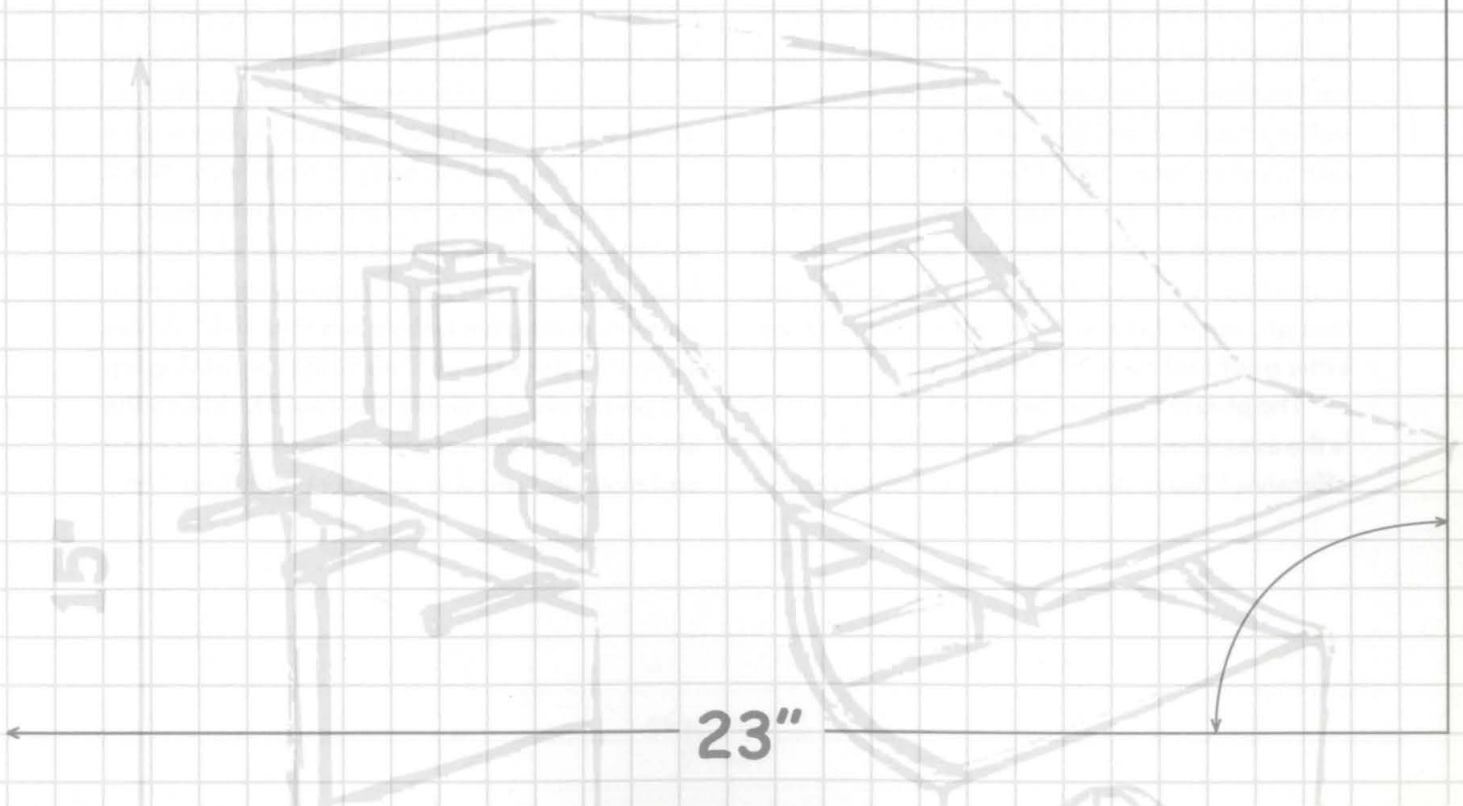
Rachel stiffened involuntarily. "You saw that for yourself."

"Then tell me what you thought of him."

She considered this for a long time before venturing a response. With a far-away look in her eyes, she answered, "I think he's a starry-eyed dreamer who's lost his faith because someone stole his book of fairy tales."

"O-kay, that was . . . deep. How about a straight answer this time? Is he date material? Do you like him?"

Rachel took a cautious sip from her coffee mug. "Yeah, I like him."



Non-Fiction
First Place
Natasha Jones



Don't Tell Me I'm Still Young...

There's something people can't seem to understand about me. I wish they did. Recently, I lost my second child; a five pound, five ounce, seventeen-inch long baby boy named Gabriel Elijah Jones. He was only four hours and fifteen minutes old when he died, and I'll never get over his death. That was almost five months ago, on April 28, 1999. Still, every time I hear a certain phrase uttered sadly by well-meaning people, I feel like screaming.

I've heard, "Oh, I'm sorry." whispered with downcast eyes and followed by an uncomfortable silence. I've heard, "Those things will happen." With that look of aloofness and a "c'est la vie" attitude in the voice of the person talking to me. I've heard, "It just wasn't meant to be." regretfully stated enough to last a lifetime. Though these comments seem sort of empty and meaningless to me, I don't find them offensive. They have a tendency to become monotonous, insincere, even annoying at times, but I accept them as words of sympathy that society has taught people to be "appropriate" to say to a grieving parent. Even the often said, "I know how you feel..." (even though the person has no idea in hell how I feel because they've never lost a child) isn't particularly bad anymore. I used to feel like yelling back at people that, no, they had no earthly idea how I felt. That too, has passed. I realize now, hindsight being 20/20, they were just trying to ease my pain by identifying with it...perhaps so I wouldn't feel so alone. No one, though, can help to ease this all-encompassing, bitter grief and anguish that I feel.

The phrase that enrages me to a boiling point is the ever popular and well meaning, yet utterly offensive, "You're still young, you can always have

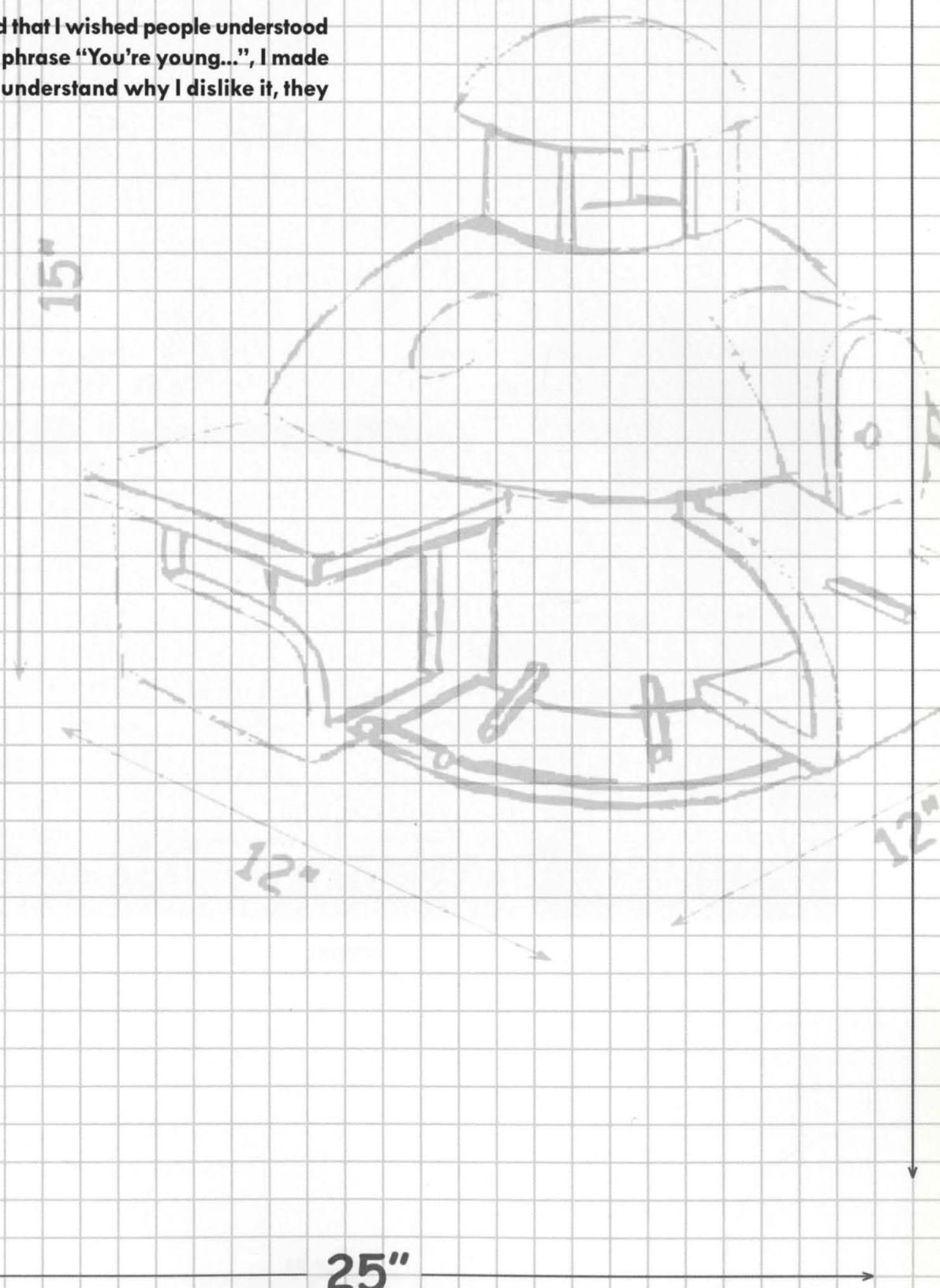
more...". Don't people get it?!? I don't want any more children. I want the two I've had. I want both my children, together. I don't want another baby- I want the one I lost. Every time I hear those words a bitter, vile taste intrudes the back of my throat as it begins to constrict with pain. My eyes sting with unshed tears as I try to contain the tidal wave of turbulent emotions surging to the surface of my being. I hear what they say and my stomach churns, flip-flopping in a soul-sickening way, making my entire body shake with unleashed anger. I loathe those words and the connotations behind them. To my tortured mind, they imply that having another child would erase the immense pain I feel. My raw, nerve-grated senses take this to mean others truly believe if I had another baby, I would forget my son and the vast abyss of emptiness and anguish his absence has left me with. I realize this is not, in all likelihood, what people intend their words to convey. They mean to show compassion, sympathy, even to put an optimistic note on a sad story with a bad ending. It still doesn't mean I want to hear it. I am very well aware of the fact that I am well within my childbearing years and have optimal time left to expand my family. But don't they think of the deep-seated fear in my heart that history may repeat itself? What of Gabe, was his life for naught, didn't he count for anything to them?

I believe the human population, in general, all too often take life for granted. The precious little things that mean so much to people like me are completely lost on them. I am engulfed by resentment when I see a woman, belly swollen with child, abusing her body in some way. When she lifts a cigarette to her lips, the toxic fumes invading her unborn child's tiny lungs like demon fingers grasping for helpless prey, does she realize she's putting her baby's health at risk? As her eager lips close around the bottle containing liquid poison, is she aware she could be killing the life inside her? Does she even care? My heart and my mind answer back a resounding "no,"

and a crippling disbelief washes over me as hot rage rises up from deep within me. My soul aches as I feel a deep emptiness inside. I see her, her womb ripe with new life, mine robbed by the uncaring, indiscriminate hand of fate and cruel circumstance. I bitterly think that she should be taught how I feel- and then I think of the precious, innocent baby nestled deep in her body, and I take it back.

When I said that I wished people understood why I hate the phrase "You're young...", I made a mistake. To understand why I dislike it, they

would have to experience my situation; something I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. I only wish they understood that I didn't want to hear it- and I wish they understood the value of a human life, no matter how short. No one is insignificant and the loss of a person can never be filled with the birth of another- for we are all unique and are all needed by someone in this world.



Computer Art
First Place
Susan Woody



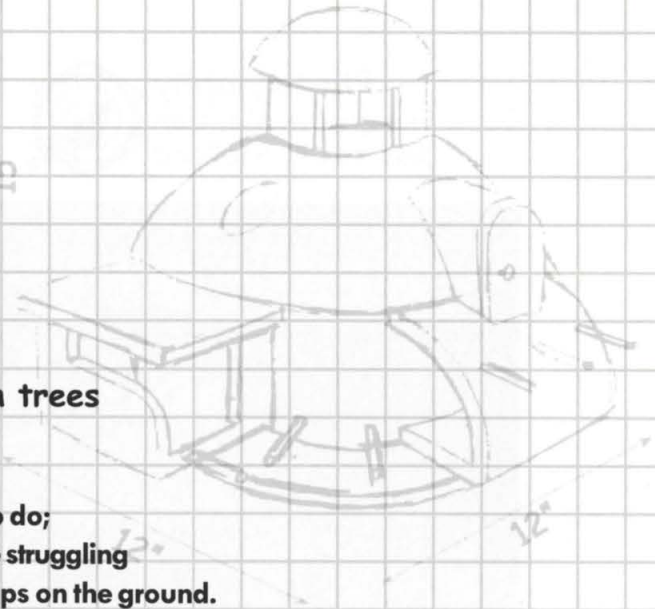
Breast

26"

Poetry
Honorable Mention
Pam Tabor



15"



memory of shiloh trees

when it was over,
no one knew what to do;
some crawling, some struggling
lying in soft, wet heaps on the ground.

to become solid like wood
now full of men's souls;
scared souls, lost souls,
souls of the damned.

bullets thick and angry
as the water turned to wine-
red,
dark,
deep with sadness.
(are prayers not answered if you but ask?)

stand straight, stand tall
and feel the voice of God-
wonder at the ways we possess you,
perfectly cloaked; ringed 'round and fine.

*never forget what happened here
that you may never pass this way again...*

it is when the cannons are silent that history begins.

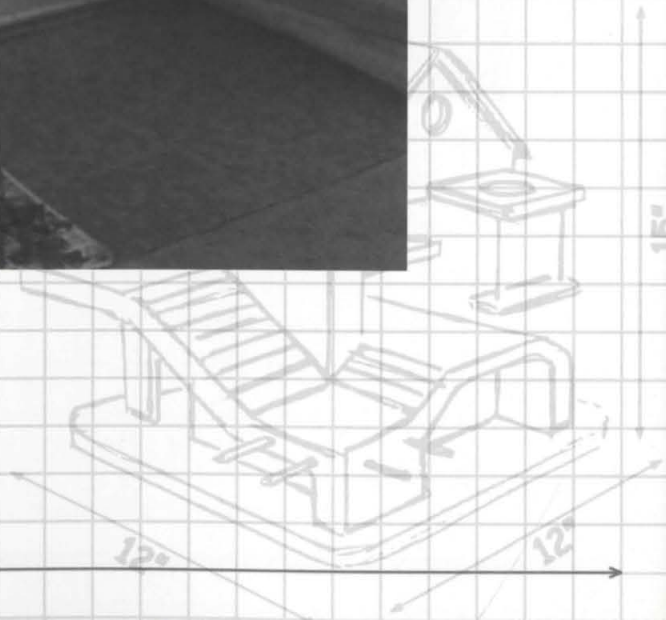
27"

Photography
Honorable Mention
Melissa K. Stallard



Untitled

28"





Boys of Summer

We will ache for this.

Still tethered by my hazy expectations,
I rise on two hours' sleep (your doing),
pour a cup of coffee, pull on an extra sweater
and step outside (another nameless voyeur)
to watch this morning masterly unfold.

This is dawn's rich pageantry of light:
a sliver of electric violet searing the horizon,
kaleidoscopic clouds burgeoning with gold.
First light picks out the gleam of treasure camouflaged by sand-
Does this begin to sound familiar?
Breaking waves evoke the sea's own siren-song.
Dolphins crest, clay-grey fins,
pelicans glide slowly, low, on lazy westerly winds,
and you (another, subtle siren) trip softly through my mind.
I am glad of it.

Daybreak blazes a transient path of light across the water.
The receding surf cast a wash of burnished gold onto the sand.
I am tempted to believe that it could bear my weight,
bridging Spirit-of-the-Earth across the hollow seas:
I could walk out to meet the white-hot sun.

This is where these past few nights have brought me:
after the tempests, after the light,
bacchanal evenings and unfettered laughter,
after learning things evocative, wild and worthwhile,
losing myself, ourselves to the fierce hands of the Atlantic,
after finding the pulse of time, of life, after unfolding,
the meeting of minds like a supernova,
after the scarce and timeless moments of breathless exultation:
it is the sort of thing that never lets us go.

In these moments, this place we are a raging success-
almost an unkept fantasy. Almost, at times, a dream,
as you and I (two worlds apart) dreamt,
that first night, of nearing one another.
Of learning. My enchanted child:
tomorrow I could wake up breathless from the power of words in your vicinity.
Faith is more real now than it has been in years,
and I am grateful to have lived, and seen this.

Fiction
Second Place
Allan Trently



Spirits in the Spruces

It is May, yet the winter still holds the reminder of bitterness in my mind. The icy expressions still chill my core and I still cry despite the warming sun. The ice and snow is melted from the mountain. There is no ice to jerk my car over the mountain and no cold to preserve my body for the few loved ones to see.

I gently tap the brakes to let a deer cross the road ahead of me. It's a scrawny one, reminds me of the hard winter we had. There must not have been much browse for the deer to eat this winter with all the snow covering everything, and how do these animals stay warm I wonder? This was one of the coldest winters on record. The cold must have frozen their bodies damaging tissue, killing cells. This time of year all the animals are small in stature after the dearth of browse, compliments of the winter. The deer finally walks off the road and I drive on by as it stands in the hemlocks. The deer turns and watches the car as I drive up the hill to the cabin.

The log cabin is a box of memories. It is a book that has just so recently ended. It is a story of a daughter, a wife, and myself building fires, telling stories, hiking, playing, and laughing. I began writing my only published novel, *Fierceness*, in this cabin about five years ago. It took four long years of my life to write that book. I can clearly remember the progression of the whole process. I can clearly remember feeling more and more frustrated with the writing, and spending many months without adding a single paragraph. The story telling, hiking, playing, and the laughing declined in the progression. I remember becoming like the protagonist in *Fierceness*, a good man hurt and disillusioned by the hate and injustices of his life and his world. Like the character, I became fierce and mean and I became


enveloped by a prevailing melancholy that shadowed my living hours. My novel has a half-hearted, happy ending that was more the editors ending than my own. After the book was completed, the ugliness in me did not stop despite my constant trying. My wife and kids understandingly did not care much for me during this period, and so we became distant from each other. And I don't know what happened, but I could never write anything worth publishing after this. I struggled but ended up failing with family and myself inside this cabin before me.

I lean my head onto my folded arms on the steering wheel and lose it. Sometimes we lose something despite the struggle over the dark, cold snare of the winter. I lost my wife, Natalie and my daughter, Lorelei to winter's gloom. It just got so dark and so cold that we couldn't stay together anymore. Now the cabin lays bare all that we were once.

I open the door and walk into the cabin. Musk and smoky smells and heavy scents of mildew swirl up in my face with the pull of the door. First thing to do is obvious; air this place out. The window over the sink has its drapes drawn open which is strange since we always close everything up before we leave. I walk over to the window, but a sheet of paper that lies on the chestnut table distracts me. What's this, I say to myself picking up the paper. It reads,

"Salutations Friend,

First let me thank you for the use of your cabin this winter. I surely would have died if it weren't for the confines of these walls. And let me thank you for the use of your food and your books. Anyway, before I go on, I guess you're wondering who I am, and why I'm thanking you? I'm a trespasser that's simple enough. I broke into your place, sir. I ate your food, slept in your bed, and used your property without your consent. I don't mean to be sarcastic when I thank you. I'm a crook and I know it. But, sir, I'm also alive. Without this cabin, I swear I would have died out there. I know you're a religious man—the Bible, the crucifix above your bed. As a Chris-



tian, I know you would have done everything you could to help a fellow son of God. So by deduction, I thank you, because I know you would accept. I hope I haven't caused any inconvenience.

Well, I need to get some things together. I just have to build a fire or I'll freeze in here. I've written a series of eight letters that are hidden around the cabin. The first letter is under the welcome mat that you have stored in the closet. Oh yes, if you're wondering how I got in, look at the window over the sink. Water got under the sill and froze pushing the window upwards. I helped the process out with a metal bar I found. It's lying outside by the window. Sorry about breaking the window lock. Talk to you later, friend."

I drop the paper onto the table and just stand there. I feel violated. What did this man, or woman I guess, do in my place? I quickly inventory what was left here over winter. We leave cans of food in case we decide to spend some time in the cabin during the winter. The excessive cold and snowy winter kept us away, or was it the excessive cold and angry stares that kept us away? I go to the larder to find it empty. The thief ate everything. In our bedroom, I have some notes. I remember leaving a notebook when we left in November. They're not important notes, but they are personal. I angrily walk into the bedroom. The oak floor creaks with every step I take. My notes are still in the drawer by the bed along with my pencil. I always keep a notebook near the bed in case I have important thoughts to jot down. I leaf through the notebook to find all the pages still there. Did the thief read this? What did he read? I speed-read through the notebook looking for something that could be embarrassing. The top of a particular page says, "I love Natalie, what is going on with me?" I remember writing this one night after Natalie and I fought. I couldn't write that day. I tried and tried to put something on paper, but not a thing would come out. She interrupted me and I got mad and blamed her for my lack of progress. I couldn't face up to the thought that I couldn't write anymore. At that time, I didn't publish for over a

year and a half. She didn't have to interrupt me when I was trying to write, but I didn't have to blame her.

Did the thief read my personal writings? I don't know why it would matter if he did or not, but it did. Maybe the answer lies in the next note. I go into the closet and lift up the welcome mat to find the next note and read it at the table.

"Hello friend and Happy New Year,

It is such a lovely day, I decided to hike up the trail behind the cabin. The ravens call like spirits in the spruces. I always feel a chill when the raven croaks. They know so much more than either you or I do. Did you know that? Yes, they have been around for millions of years. Each night two ravens, Munin and Hugin talk into the ears of their master, the Norwegian God Odin. They tell him everything that has happened in the world, and they tell him what everybody in the world is saying. This is a heavy burden on the ravens and on Odin, for you see, the bad isn't filtered out for their ears. The ravens bring bad news because they have to. Would it be logical to take a novel and only read the happy parts? The ravens bring bad news because they know better. I read the papers whenever I can get one. Most of the time, I find a paper in a garbage can. I read the paper then convert it into a blanket sometimes. Sometimes it gets too warm sleeping under the burdens of the world.

I'm drinking hemlock tea by the firelight. I hope you've experienced the taste of nature, sir. All pines can be made into teas rich in Vitamins. In fact, the pioneers were saved from scurvy by drinking nature's teas. I make a toast to you, sir. May you live a life filled with peace, love, and understanding. May your days be filled with joy.

Goodnight friend.

I placed the next letter in a pair of old boots."

Why doesn't the thief sign the letters? I don't even have a name or gender yet. I place the two notes together and put them into the drawer next to the bed. We keep the boots in the same closet that the welcome mat is kept, so I search

the closet and find a pair of well-worn hiking boots with a note tucked down inside one boot. I pull out the note and read it.

"Good morning to you sir. And what a good one! I'll do some more hiking today. I want to collect some wintergreen berries and make some candy. I saw a large patch of them yesterday on a windswept hillside. The wind that bites my face exposes those beautiful red berries for me to see. Oh, it is just too good.

Talk to you later. Peace- the Raven Spirit.

You'll find the next letter behind the photograph on the wall. Is that your family?"

I look up at the family portrait that hangs upon the wall. Natalie, Lorelei, and I are dressed in our Easter best, and smiling at the outside of the cabin with our arms gently drawn around each other. I get up and lift the portrait down from the wall all the while staring at the photograph. A white piece of paper falls to the ground as the portrait is lifted. I sit down at the table holding the portrait as if it were sacred, and reminisce about the happy feelings we shared on the day it was taken. If the picture were taken two days later, we would not be holding each other and we would not be smiling. Neglecting the trespasser's notes, I spend the rest of the day cleaning up the cabin and trying to air out the smells, and the thoughts [although, smells and thoughts do not parallel each other, is it ok to leave this the way it is?], of a long, lonely winter.

The oil lamp flickers yellow light throughout the bedroom. I turn the wick down drowning the flame in oil. I close my eyes to see Natalie and Lorelei bouncing on the bed I lie in, and I see myself reading stories to my daughter in this bed when she was too scared to sleep alone. I roll onto my side clutching the pillow tightly to drift asleep. But before I drift off, my friend, the thief, enters my mind. I imagine a woman breaking into my cabin and writing those letters. I imagine her gentle hands writing those thoughts by the firelight. I can see her smiling as she writes, "may your day be filled with joy." She lay in this bed all winter. I run my hand up and down the cold,

silky sheet that covers the bed imagining her there. My fantasy arouses my curiosity and I can not sleep. I get up and go into the kitchen and read the note that fell from behind my family's portrait.

"I hear a Great Horned Owl hooting in the deep gray forest. A full moon lights up the tops of the pines as they gently rock in the breeze. The owl is wanting for a mate for it is almost time to nest for their species. I think the nesting season may be put off a few days due to the cold.

I collected wintergreen but put off boiling them until tomorrow. I found the notebook in your bedroom, Mr. Corby, or may I call you Robert. I must confess, I read some of your writings. I'm sorry for this violation, but I needed to get to know you a little better. I figured that the notes would give me a clue as to who you are. You have no worry that I will tell others, because there are no others. It's just me in this life, and that is my choice. But anyway, I'm sorry Robert. I'll tell you something about myself to make up for my intrusion. It is only fair.

My Grandfather was a coal miner in Scranton, Pennsylvania. He was a member of the Socialist Party and some say a member of a subversive union. He hurt his back during an explosion in the mine. The company gave him sick leave, but after two days they replaced him with an immigrant from the Ukraine. My grandfather and his family starved during this time. His son, my father, had to work in the rail yards loading coal when he was just 10 years old. Grandfather was a strong man, though. He wouldn't spend any money at the pubs. No, money always went to feed his family. He made some money playing Irish ditties on fiddle at the local bars, for he was a skilled player and probably would have made a good living in music if he stayed in Ireland.

My father fought in World War II. He was infantry or what we call today, a grunt. With his M1 Carbine, he killed as many as 100 men, all fascists. He was an American hero and I am very proud of him. After the war, he told me he had

nightmares up until he died in 1968. He saw women and children being shot, and he saw Nazis exploding in his nightmares. I am proud of him and all that fought in the war, but I can't get over the idea that they had to do it, they had to kill.

I was born in 1949 in Scranton. When I was 19, the United States wanted me to fight in Vietnam so I enrolled in Penn State and took classes in art. I wanted to paint ugly pictures of my world. My father died of lung cancer the year before because of his habit of smoking. My mother died in 1970 from natural causes. In my junior year, I dropped out of college and made my way to Canada, which I never got to. I never settled anywhere, in fact. I rambled in the mountains learning from the raven and the wolf and the bear. I learned to see things with an open perception. I died after falling from a crag. A raven picked my eyes out and sucked out my soul. Now my soul is part of that raven. I fly the Earth everyday to search for love and peace. And you know what, I find it everywhere. In every home, and in every community. I see it in the government, I see it on the campuses, and I see it on the streets. Like Munin and Hugin, I hear the sad stories that work their way out of the saloons, the basements, the battlefields, and the minds of sane people going insane. I listen to them closely, all those stories of killings, protests, pollution, and chaos in a world made with peaceful people of all kinds. You can bet that I see and hear these things, Robert.

Well, that's my story. I am not dead of course. I'm right here writing this for you. My body is very much alive. A part of me has died, though, and I'm glad for that.

Good night, Robert. The next letter is under the bed mattress. Raven Spirit."

Before I struggle down into sleep, thoughts of Raven Spirit whirl through my mind like a headache. Raven Spirit is not a woman. The United States recruited men for the Vietnam War. It was the young men that ran to Canada, but didn't women get drafted as well? What did Raven Spirit mean by seeing things with an open per-

ception and what did he mean by a raven sucking up his soul? Was he on drugs? Was he taking drugs in my cabin? And what is this idealistic crap? I begin to believe that my intruder is just a drifting hippie. He is just a freeloader taking what he can from me. He has violated me by breaking into my home and reading my personal thoughts. What gives him any right to read something so personal as my diary? And such tenuous excuses? He's reading it to get to know me. Why the Hell do I need him to get to know me? After awhile, my thoughts drift into incoherence and I fall into sleep.

I wake up tired and reluctant to leave the bed. I slowly pull myself up from the bed feeling a little dizzy as I stand up. I go into the kitchen on wobbly legs and make breakfast. The rest of the day is spent chopping firewood and cleaning up the yard. Many branches and whole trees fell under the weight of the snow leaving my yard a mess of debris. The garden needs tending as well. Small green shoots of the daffodils have broken through the soil. Soon they will blossom into bright, yellow blooms. Thoughts of Raven Spirit occupy my mind as I work. These thoughts become overwhelming by lunchtime so I head into the cabin to read the next letter. I fix myself a sandwich and some coffee and sit down at the chestnut table to read the letter. The coffee ironically makes me sleepy.

I go into the bedroom to read the next note. It is under the mattress just like Raven Spirit said it would be.

"Hello Robert. It's been a wonderful week for myself. I finished the wintergreen candy I promised myself I'd make. I already finished eating it. I just don't have any discipline when it comes to candy. Well, I hope you had a wonderful week. I hope you had a happy week.

As I told you, I read your notebook, and I am sorry that you are having problems with your wife. I hope the magic of this winter is bringing you peace. The pure white snow reminds all of us everyday of peace, and like the snow, peace should cover everything. I shouldn't offer you any

advice, because I don't know how you and your wife are doing at present. What happens in the past has already happened, right? You won't see these letters till you come back up here in the spring, so they will all be past tense. What I can offer you, Robert is prayer. I'll make it an obligation to pray for you every night. I'll say a prayer to your God, and I'll make a special wish to the raven next time I see it. If your marriage doesn't survive than it was meant to be. You have a new calling then.

If pain should arise inside you, watch it leave you. I have learned how to deal with all the painful situations in life, Robert. The answer to all sadness is to do nothing! If it arises in me, I sit and stare into nothing, I watch nothing, and I think nothing. If sad thoughts want to enter my brain, they really have to try hard, because I'm not going to just let them in. I'm talking about meditation. You do it when you go to church; you just don't realize it. When I fell off that crag, I lay there and meditated until my bones healed. I never felt any pain because I wasn't there. I was nowhere; I was in Limbo.

For every sad thing there are ten-fold happy things. To every season there is love, there is peace, and there is happiness. Robert, if it doesn't work out realize that the world is too beautiful to be sad.

Good night friend. May peace be with you.

The next letter is behind the photo of your daughter."

I don't understand. Why should my intruder care about me? I shake my head and smile causing a tear to fall from my eye so I wipe it away. Well, maybe I will be happy, but answer me this, who the Hell are you?

I boil myself some soup stirring and pensively humming Turn, Turn, Turn by Pete Seegar. I drop a leafy branch of hemlock into the soup to add a little nature to my meal. I wish my wife and daughter were here to share this.

"Hey friend, Robert. How are you today?

Wow, you really have a beautiful place here. I spent the week exploring. Did you know

that there is a bog on the other side of the mountain? I collected some cranberries. I didn't take too many because the birds need them to survive the winter. I watched the Black-Capped Chickadees gleaning the berries. I may come back here this summer to collect blueberries, because there are so many bushes around here. Maybe I'll see you then. That would be something.

Near the summit of the mountain is a scrub-oak field where I collected Sweet Fern to make tea. I also collected some sumac for the same purpose. Some Cedar Waxwings greeted me as I pulled a sumac branch down to get to the fruit. There are plenty of berries for all of us. The raven was present as well, and so I made my special wish to it. He'll do fine with it.

I'm now sitting in front of your fireplace writing about the night. Do you notice the Northern forest nights, Robert? It's a cold one out there right now that's why I'm in here. But I notice it whenever I can. Do you believe in magic? If you don't then you've never walked the forest at night.

Goodnight friend. The next letter can be found in your history book. "

The day is slow and hanging in the stale air. I fill the bird feeder with some fresh birdseed that I brought up from town. I only know the chickadee and the snowbird. I don't know the difference between the raven and the crow, and I did not know that there were cranberries in the bog. We would have picked cranberries for Thanksgiving and made our own cranberry sauce. Maybe we'd still be together if I knew what Raven Spirit knew.

"Hello Robert. There's new snow on the ground, today. It snowed and snowed last night. I went looking for owls up on the mountain ridge, but got too cold and had to come back. I almost got frostbite in my ear-lobes, but some hot tea melted the frost.

Did you know there are ghosts in your cabin, Robert? Watch for them. There is a father and a daughter here. She died of starvation in your cabin because her father couldn't feed her enough. Seems her father was hurt at work and

wasn't offered compensation. He was fired like my own Grandfather. He couldn't get a job in town because he was Irish. His daughter, Tara died in his arms. He hung himself in the cabin and now haunts the place. You need to have an inner perception to see them, but they're here sure enough. They finally appeared to me last night while I was meditating. I apparently transferred into their dimension. The father, Shaun told me about losing his land to an Englishman while living in Ireland. He spat on the ground and cursed Oliver Cromwell when he told me this. He told me about cutting the mighty chestnut trees and then the massive hemlocks on the mountain. I once saw a ghost of a chestnut tree. It was quit magnificent and bare the most fruit I have ever seen on any tree. Well anyway, they cut the whole mountain down. This mountain had not a single tree on it at one time. He lived in this cabin along with his daughter. His neighbors lived in similar cabins all up and down the mountain. They were all working class trying to make the best living they could. An unfortunate mudslide washed four of these cabins off the mountain. Exhaustion and monotony made Shaun careless one day, and he allowed a large branch to smash his tibia. He spent the next three weeks in the cabin crying and watching his daughter starve to death.

After that night of seeing them, I saw Tara and Shaun only sparingly. He never talked to me anymore and she never talked to me at all. He just looked at me with a long, sad face. She looked scared and disturbed. It was like they needed to get this off their chest, but now that it was off, they went back to being depressed. I felt so sad myself after seeing them this way. I didn't meditate. I wanted to feel sad.

Good night Robert. The next letter is folded and stuck in a crack under the chestnut table. The chestnut tree never bears fruit anymore. The forest is a ghost."

I spend my time between the cabin and my home in town for the rest of the summer. I write much of the time, because I have lots of ideas for stories. I write about ghosts of people and the

people the ghosts used to be. I write about forests and drifters that drift through those forests preaching to anyone that would listen. I write about families picking cranberries on the mountain and about picking chestnuts from the ground. I read that years ago people actually used shovels to gather chestnuts, because they were so numerous. Well, I write about that. I write about the blight that killed all the chestnuts in America. I write about ravens that have messages for special people and the reasons these special people decide to live on.

"Robert, the sun is melting the snow. I walked outside without my jacket on today. It's almost time for me to leave and discover new places. I find the answers to all my questions on this mountain, Robert. Once I questioned if the world was insane. I believed it was until I saw fifty-seven snow geese flying over the mountaintop. Yes, I'll need to go soon and find more geese and more answers.

Talk to you later, Robert. The next letter is in your encyclopedia on page 163 in R."

I leave a set of encyclopedias in the cabin for reference for whenever I write. I open the R volume, and find the letter placed on top of the subject reincarnation. It says that when you reach perfection, you may exit the cycle of life and death and enter Nirvana. You always reincarnate as a person and never as another animal. "As another animal" is crossed out.

"Good peace, Robert. I cleaned up some of the mess I was making around your place. The cans are in the shed out back. I found the key to the shed under the front rock of the patio. It's strange, I knew right where that key was.

Well, I need to say goodbye to you. I'll be leaving over the mountain tomorrow to search for answers. I've enjoyed my stay here in your domicile. Again, I'm sorry for taking advantage of your property. I hope there are no hard feelings. I wish you luck with your life, Robert."

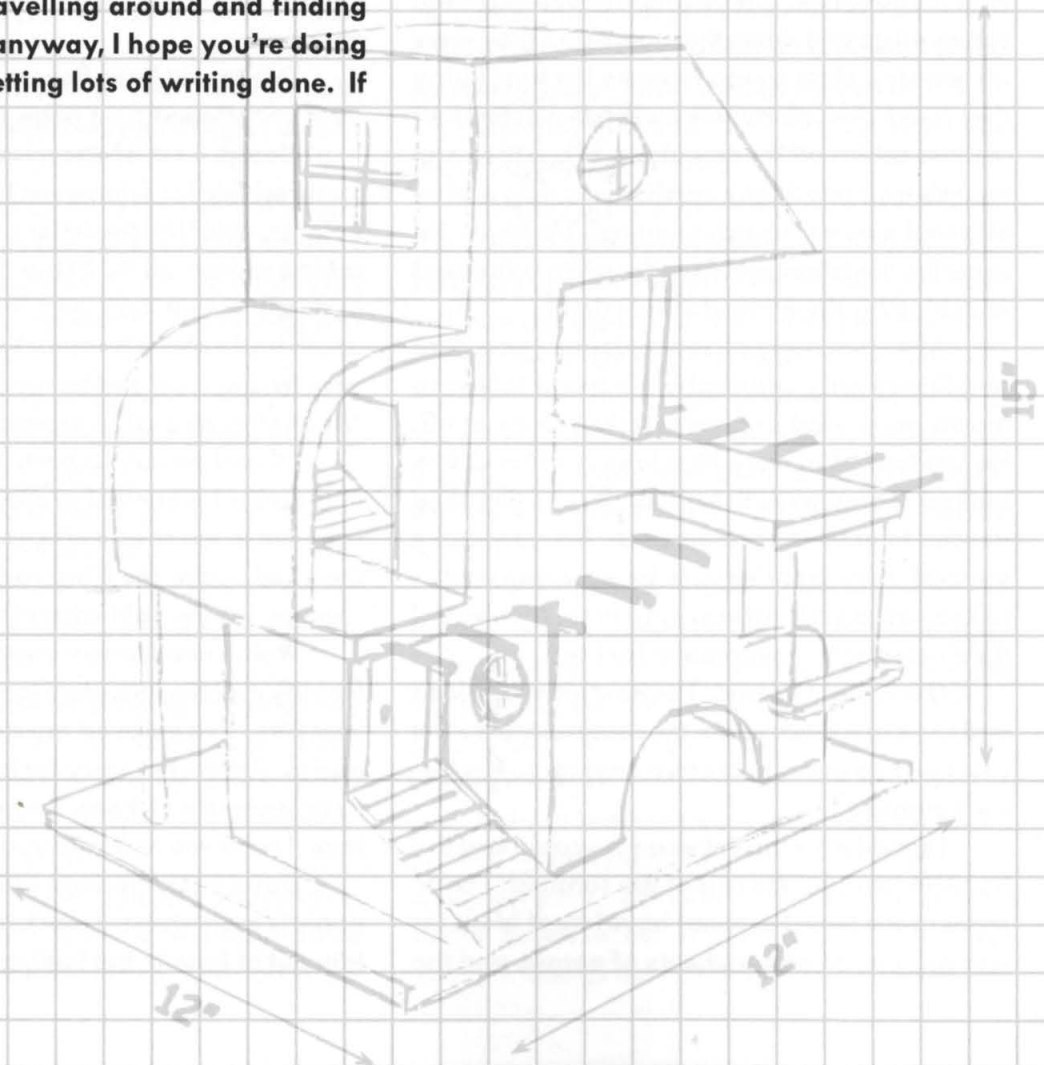
Days pass, flowers bloom, and the sun's angle is more direct. I reach the top of the mountain out of breath, but feeling wonderful. The

sphagnum moss below the hill shines a light-green hue. The black spruces growing throughout the bog stand out like beacons calling on to wonder. I step down the hill and end up filling my boot with water in the deceiving solidity of the bog ground. Like Raven Spirit said, the blueberries are everywhere. The plump, shiny, blue berries are sweeter than honey on chocolate. I eat more than I put into the pail. Every now and again, I look around hoping for Raven Spirit to show himself from the thickets, but he never does. On a bare alder branch, I find a folded piece of paper with my name on it impaled by a broken branch. I pull the paper, which is quite damp, off the branch and unfold it. I find Raven Spirit's handwriting scribbled on the page.

"Hello Mr. Robert Corby. I hope you find this letter before it disintegrates. You've picked a beautiful day to come out picking berries. I've been quit busy travelling around and finding things out. Well, anyway, I hope you're doing fine and you're getting lots of writing done. If

you look up to the sky you'll see me flying by. I'm the one with the hoarse call. Thanks for everything."

I look up into the sky and see nothing. Disappointed, I pick up my things and start climbing the hill to the crest of the mountain. At the summit, I look down across the valley wishing I could fly. From the sky comes a croaking. I look up behind me and see a raven flying towards me. It circles over the summit and flies off down the valley disappearing from my sight. For some reason, and I don't know why, I think to myself that when I die, I'm going to reincarnate into a raven. By that time, when I bring back the news, all of it will be good.



36"

Drawing/Printmaking
Honorable Mention
John Hilton



Little by little, the face of a stranger
looked out of my face—
though my face remained changelessly there.
It was I who was growing there,
I and yourself;
it was you growing there,
all of us one,
all growing and changing
till no one could say who we were.
Sometimes we remember
the presence that lived with us,
there is something we want from him—that he remember us,
maybe,
or know, at least, we were he and now talk
with his tongue,
but there in the rubbish of hours
he looks at us, acknowledging nothing.

I Once Was Lost

Photography
Second Place
Melissa K. Stallard



Untitled

38"

Poetry
Third Place
Tamara Baxter



July Sun

Notice how July sun
outlines everything in silver,
turns grass to cellophane.
The last irises have long

gone to parchment beside
the front porch steps. See how
the hollyhocks' heads bend
east to west with the will of the sun?

Crows sitting like clothespins
along a bony branch of sycamore
laugh at a hawk circling
the drought-dry pond. Heat

boogers rain-dance above the
dried up mud puddle. Water
has gone to dust in the well.
Thirsty yellow jackets come to drink

from the rinds of watermelons
left scattered under the locust.
Noon-high hot, the sun sucks breath
like a cat. And, perish the thought,

there is not a breeze in all the earth
to turn a leaf.



The Proving Ground

It was the hottest part of the day when Gillian decided the plants needed watering. Ben tried to tell her it wasn't a good idea to water plants with the sun this blame hot, but Gillian wanted to anyway.

The trees were once fresh, leafy, healthy looking crepe myrtles. But, after several months out in the unrelenting Georgia sun, they had been reduced to mere sticks.

The ground around the poor things was the usual sort of Georgia red clay. It was hard as nails and so densely packed that Gillian and Ben had spent half a day trying to dig a hole big enough to set them out in when they first brought the trees home.

Ben stood at the kitchen window glaring at Gillian outside walking across the yard. He took one last swallow of coffee, threw the mug in the sink and resolved himself to helping her after all.

He went out into the too bright sunlight, squinting and swearing under his breath. "Damn, it ain't fit out here for man or animal, much less trees." Reaching the potting shed, he opened the door.

A slight musty, earthy smell assaulted his senses as Ben entered the small building. He hated the smell of the earth, of old dirt and grass. He hated the way Gillian almost demanded he care about the trees, made him go through this useless ritual of watering them everyday.

Spying the water hose coiled like a green and white striped snake on its hanger, he reached out and lifted it from the wall. Throwing it over his shoulder, he turned and started out of the shed.

"Let's get this over with," Ben muttered to himself as he slammed the door shut behind him.

Gillian stood shaking her head. She was lamenting over the sad almost lifeless trees. They

were such puny and neglected looking little things. When she first picked out the small seedlings, she had envisioned mighty oaks springing forth, spreading their massive branches across her front lawn like a Southern plantation of old.

Reality set in a little while after and she began to realize the saplings never stood a chance and she wasn't ever going to live in a Southern plantation.

Gillian raised her head and saw Ben lumbering across the yard, hose in tow.

"Uh-oh," she thought. "He doesn't look happy." She raised her hand to shield her eyes, squinting, trying to make out his mood before he reached her. She knew too well the way he walked when angry, the tense, wired-up way he would carry himself.

She called out, "Need any help honey?"

"Nope," Ben answered, "got it under control."

Gillian bent down and pressed her fingers into the clay. It was unrelenting, unforgivable and she began to wonder if there was any way for them to make it at all.

Ben slowly made his way over to the water spigot and let the hose fall to the ground. Picking up one end of it, he screwed it to the tap and began to uncoil the rest of it across the yard. Gillian watched his every move before starting her way over to be ready when he needed the water turned on. They had done this so many times they had it down to a regular routine.

"Ready?" Gillian called out.

"Yeah, let 'er rip." Ben had a beer in one hand and turned it up, the other hand held the hose, which he aimed at the miserable trees.

Gillian turned the spigot on full blast, listening as the water made its way through the length of the hose, and for a moment stood lost in thought. She thought of deserts, the dry aridness of the environment and of how despite the harshness of it, life still thrived there. Plants and animals adapted, resolved themselves to what they couldn't change if they wanted to. They made a

home in a place that appeared hopeless and downright dangerous at first.

Ben looked down, watching as the water finally made its way to the trees. They had to be thirsty; there hadn't been a good rain in months. Even though they were watered almost daily like this, nature did a better job and on a much grander scale.

The water ran out around the trees, swirling a little before running off down the yard leaving a dark, wet path behind due to the wonderful effects of gravity and the dense, stubborn, useless red clay.

"Shit fire," Ben swore, "this ain't gonna work." He stood thinking a minute, throwing back his head and closing his eyes.

Gillian was still standing by the spigot. She glanced over at the connection and discovered a praying mantis perched there. "Look Ben, it's a praying mantis. I haven't seen one of these in a long time."

"So what? Ask him to pray for some rain. I think I'll have another beer." He dropped the hose and went down the yard into the trailer.

Gillian bent down to get a closer look at the mantis. It was a vivid green and seemed unafraid. It sat with its little arms folded in mock prayer, head cocked to one side, staring back at Gillian's questioning gaze.

"Hey, how 'bout some rain?" Gillian whispered. "Think you can manage a small shower at least?"

She lifted her arm and brought her hand closer. She hesitantly let her finger touch the mantis's back where its wings came together lying flat. It never moved, allowing her to softly stroke its backside. Gillian fell into a small trance, stroking and whispering, wondering what powers the tiny insect possessed.

The slamming of the trailer door brought her back to reality. Ben was making his way back with a fresh beer in his hand.

"This ain't working," he declared, "ground's too damn hard, these sticks are better off dead."

He stumbled slightly and then corrected his stride.

Gillian removed her hand from the mantis and stood. The mantis continued to sit and stare, its triangular head turning from side to side, sizing up the creature that had dared touch it.

"Wait, let's try it again," she almost pleaded.

Her husband looked at her, shaking his head in perfect rhythm to the mantis's, which bobbed and jumped in disbelief (or was it sympathy?).

"I don't have all day. I've got work to do." He snapped as if she didn't know him at all.

Ben bent down and grabbed up the hose. Deciding on a new plan of attack, he held the end a little farther away from the intended target. "OK, turn it on," he shouted.

Gillian jerked around and turned the water back on. "Excuse me," she said to the mantis. She was careful not to disturb his little prayer session.

Ben watched as the water hit the ground above the tree roots this time. It made its way down to the trees and by the time it got there, it had actually begun to sink in a little.

"Well, what do you know, hey, it's working!" He exclaimed. Beer in hand, he stood proudly, feet apart, shoulders thrown back, suddenly the epitome of manhood.

"Great!" Gillian shouted. She threw her hands up in a sudden burst of joy. Her happiness turned to sudden pain. Looking down at her left hand, she discovered she had broken off the nail of her index finger; however, it wasn't only broken, it was ripped off all the way down to the quick. Gillian went to get her nails done once a week. They were acrylic nails that the beautician glued on with a concoction of super-human strength.

She brought her hand up to her face and looked at the ragged remains. Blood had already started pouring out from what was left of her nail. It throbbed with a sharp, stabbing pain that brought tears to her eyes. She squeezed her eyes shut and tried to think of something else.

"For Christ's sake Gillian, get a grip," Ben shouted at her, "you'd think you just lost an arm or something." He shook his head as he pulled

the hose over to the next clump of trees and started to water them.

Gillian placed her hand in her shirt, wrapping the cloth tenderly around it. She squeezed her finger, trying to stop the bleeding.

She looked up as a huge flock of birds rose up from the neighbor's trees across the road. They made a shadow crossing overhead, temporarily blocking out the sun.

She thought to herself how wonderful it must be to fly, to take off on a whim. She had always imagined that flying was like a dream, that it must be heavenly to ride the wind currents to wherever they led. Gillian felt she was witnessing a miracle of sorts. Birds were surely the luckiest of God's creatures; they never had to worry who was going to take care of them.

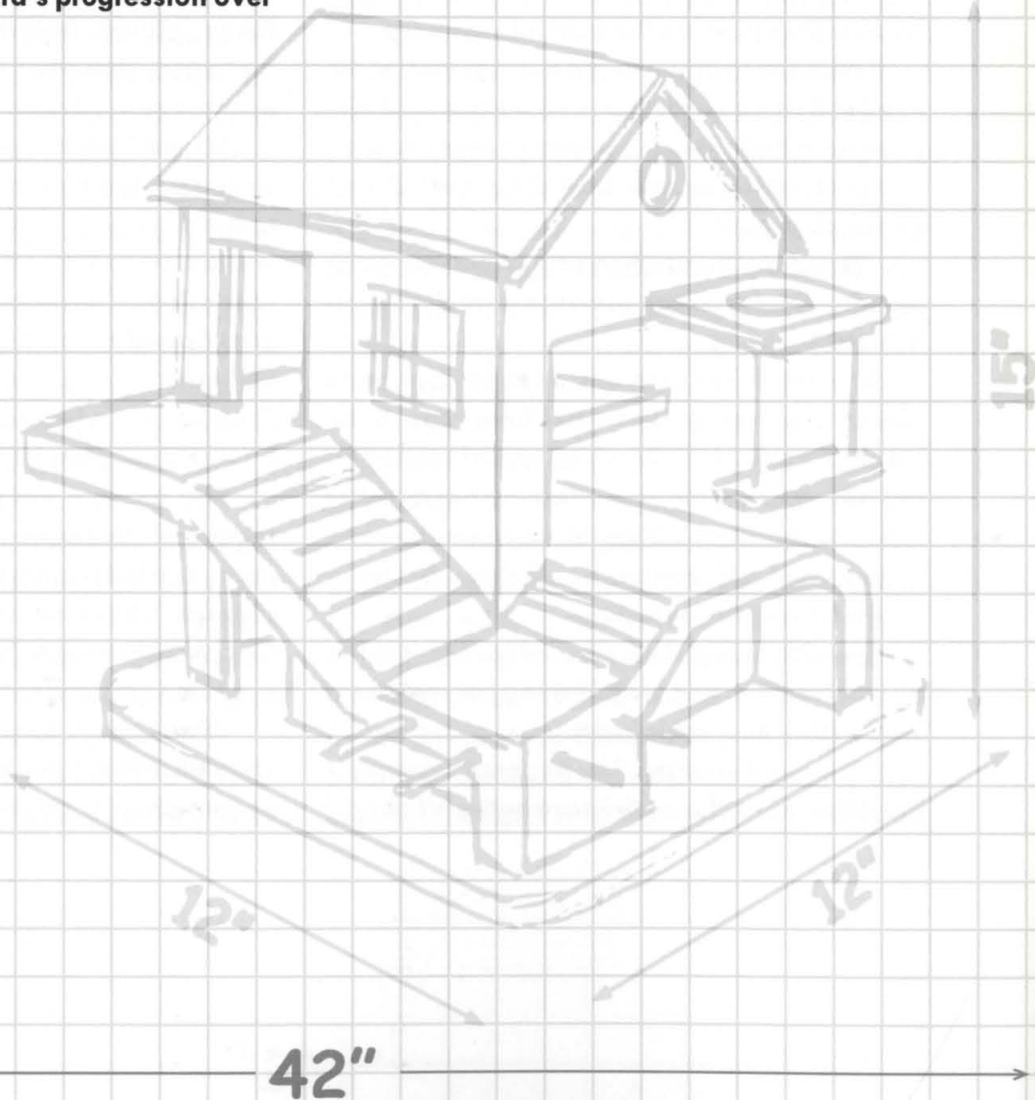
"His eye is on the sparrow," she whispered, recalling a verse she had read in Sunday school during her childhood. She looked at her finger, the ragged ends still seeping and throbbing. Gillian stuck her fingertip into her mouth and looked up to follow the bird's progression over the hill across the way.

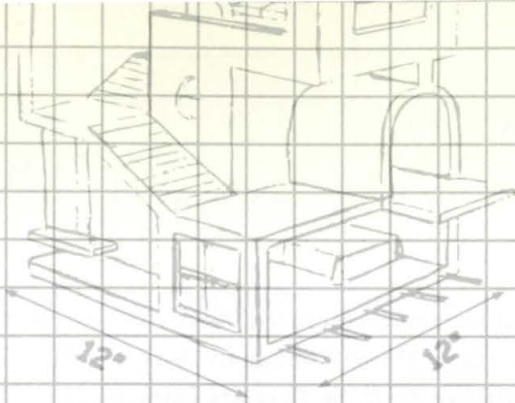
"See how high they fly," she called out to Ben who stood in disinterest, trying to finish his beer before it got hot.

"Hey," she shouted up to the black cloud, "how's the weather up there anyway?"

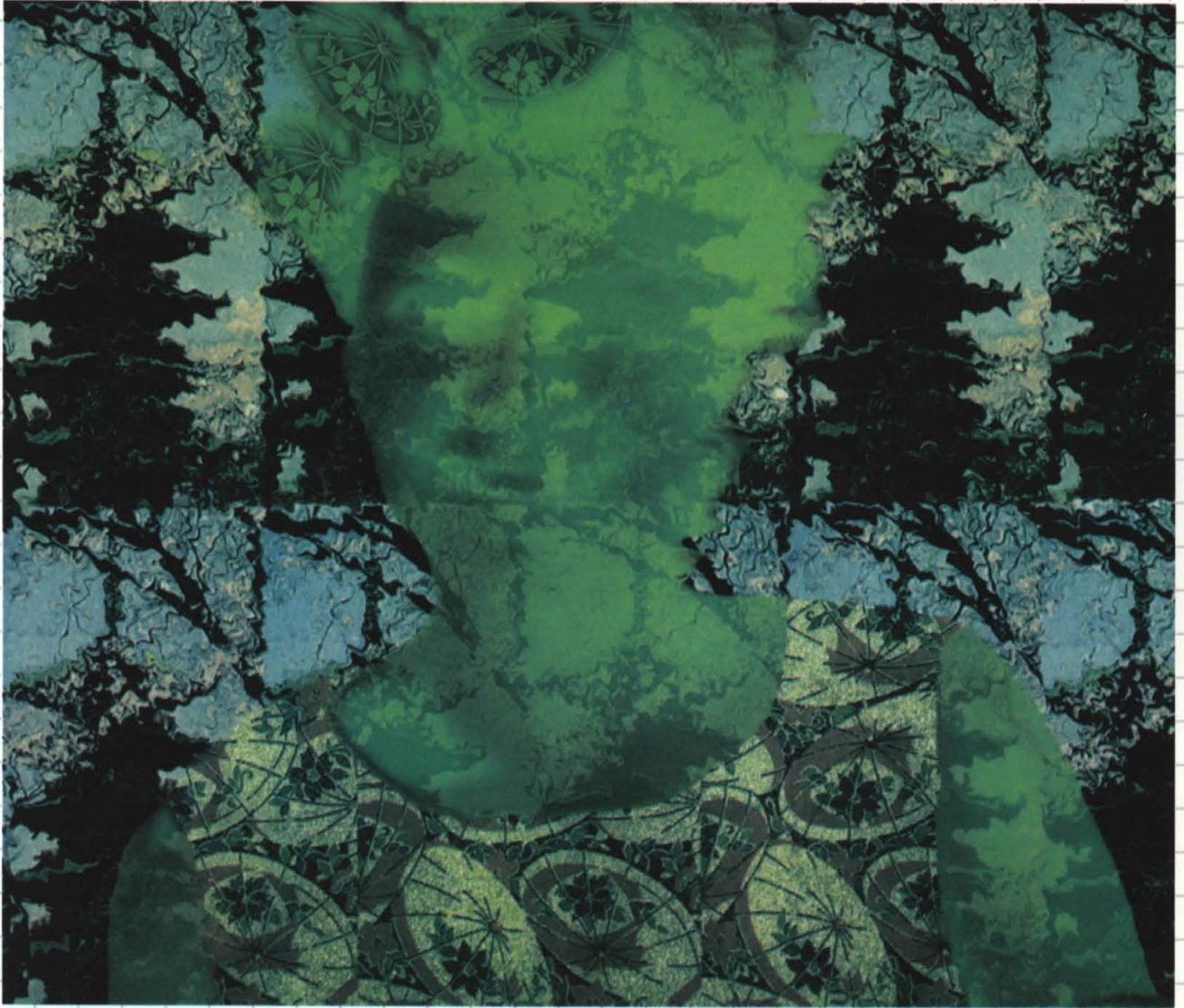
"Stupid bitch." Ben said, turning and starting back to the trailer.

Gillian stood watching him go with the sharp, metallic taste of her own blood filling her mouth and the harsh words of her husband finally setting her free.





Computer Art
Honorable Mention
Laurie Relleva



Fortune Kookie

43"

Interview with Dr. Anne LeCroy

Retiring Professor Dr. Anne LeCroy joined the East Tennessee State University Department of English in 1959. Dr. LeCroy earned her B.A. in Latin from Bryn Mawr College in 1947, her M.A. in Latin and Linguistics from Bryn Mawr College in 1948, and her Ph.D. in Classics from the University of Cincinnati in 1952. Having taught almost every course in the department from Women Literature to Grammar and Usage, she calls herself the "jack of all trades, master of none." She has chaired numerous thesis committees and initiated English 3100, which is now Concepts of Language. At the University, Dr. LeCroy served as president of the Faculty Senate for one year and as a Faculty Senate member for 21 years. Last year, she received the William Fowler Award from the College of Education for teaching. She has published various articles ranging in subject matter from religion to popular culture in journals such as *Liturgy*, *Salem Press*, *The Living Church*, and the *Quarterly Review of Double Speak*. In addition to her work at the University, Dr. LeCroy served on the Standing Liturgical Committee of the Episcopal Church from 1972-1980. She has published 12 translations of Latin hymns and last year was nominated for the J.C. Penny Service in Hospice Award.

MK: Did you know you wanted to be an English teacher when you began your education at Bryn Mawr?

I went to Bryn Mawr intending to study English, but I changed my mind because I didn't like freshman composition. My idea of studying English, I guess, was different. I wanted to study what I would have called grammar and language, and I didn't care much for the reading we had to do. I got kind of tired of it; so I changed over to Latin.

MK: Where did your interest in studying language originate?

I started studying French kind of early, in grammar school, and then my parents insisted that I take Latin in high school because they said, you're just not going to be able to get in college without it, so I took Latin. I got bored with it in high school, but I discovered Latin poetry in college and that made the difference. I believe a background in language can be enriching when dealing with literature, especially poetry, but in other forms too, certainly.

MK: What aspect or aspects of language intrigue you the most?

I'm kind of a word person. I like to play with language and language puzzles. I'm not too great at some of them, but I like to watch how language works and see how it develops. There's also the misuse of language in order to manipulate people, which is the double speak area. Advertising, very skillful advertisement writing, commercials, and politicians, and on and on. It gets you thinking about what people can really do with language, and how people can understand, misunderstand, and assume a lot of things about it that just aren't so.

MK: What are your plans after retirement?

There's the Clinical Pastoral Education study over at the Medical Center which I've been working on for almost a year and half. I also want to go back and return to hospice work as a volunteer for the hospital as well. There will be other things to do, because I am also studying to be an ordained deacon in the Episcopal Church. I got started on that officially about a year and a half ago.

Editor's Note

We are pleased to present *Mockingbird 2000*, the 26th annual publication of ETSU's award-winning art and literary magazine. Thanks to the aid of our judges and advisors, we believe this year's issue will contribute to the magazine's long standing tradition of quality and excellence. We would like to thank everyone who submitted material to the magazine and encourage them to continue to do so as long as they are students at ETSU. This year's submissions were screened by staff members who selected the top entries and then forwarded them to our judges for final placing. Thanks again to our judges: Lisa Alther, fiction; John Bowers, non-fiction; Nell Maiden, poetry; and Carol Norman, art.

We would also like to thank the student Activities Allocation Committee who provided the funds to print the magazine and the ETSU Foundation and Friends of the Reece Museum who provided the prize money for the literary and art competitions.

Ryan S. Otto
Editor

Subscription Information
Mockingbird
c/o Department of English
Box 70683
East Tennessee State University
Johnson City, TN 37614-0683

To receive an additional copy of this year's *Mockingbird* by mail, send a check or money order for \$4.00 (\$2.00 to cover the cost of the magazine, plus \$2.00 for postage and handling) to the publishing office address listed above. Please be sure to include a mailing address. Due to limited staffing during summer school sessions, allow ten to twelve weeks for delivery.

Printer's Address
ETSU University Press
East Tennessee State University
Johnson City, TN 37614

Mockingbird published in 2000 by ETSU University Press an imprint of ETSU University Press,
Johnson City, TN

